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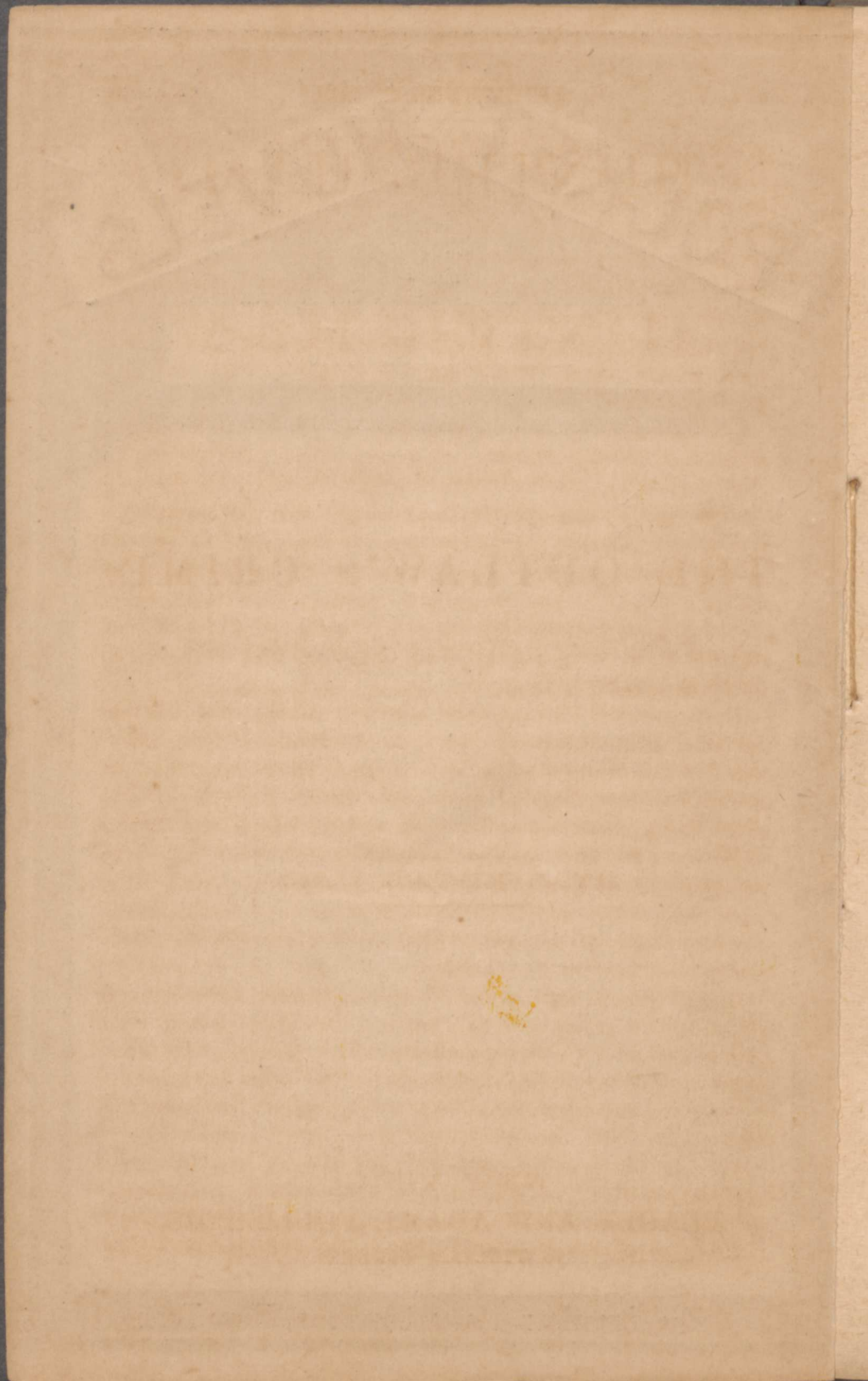


Hunter Ham.

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HUNTER HAM;

OR,

THE OUTLAW'S CRIME.

BY J. EDGAR ILIFF.

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HUNTER HAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE CRIME IN EMBRYO.

THE bright summer day was over; but the sun's golden rays were yet lingering upon the bosom of the gentle-flowing Ohio. A sweet stillness was on the stream, and in the dark woods, and under the low-drooping willows, only disturbed at long intervals by the call of some wild-bird or the ominous howl of a distant wolf mingling with that of the savage wild-cat.

Upon the low Kentucky, or southern side of the river, at the point where our story opens, the dwarfish willows grew down to the water's edge and dipped their long, slender branches therein, forming a complete covert for the aquatic game which abounded at the early day of which we write; while upon the Ohio, or northern bank, the land rose into beautiful hills, whose summits and sides were covered with noble oaks. The latter's trunks and limbs were festooned by clinging vines, and clothed in green with plants of parasitical nature, and flowering propensity.

As the golden bars on the water disappeared, and twilight's gloom spread gently o'er the beautiful scene, a young man emerged from the willows, and stood with the stream gurgling up as high as his knees, gazing toward the opposite bank, as if searching for some object ere the night was fairly around him.

He was tall, and his limbs plainly showed strength and activity combined, while his face expressed that necessary caution which became a habit to the early settlers of Kentucky.

His hair was black and very long; and as it lay in waves

upon his shoulders, it was strikingly beautiful. His features were regular, though coarse, and his eyes were small and piercing, sometimes dark brown ; but, when full of fire, as black as his hair.

His dress had but a tinge of civilization in its wildness ; and that observable tinge lay in his hat, which was broad, and slouched down over his forehead and the back of his neck. His feet were incased with moccasins of exquisite but durable workmanship—his lower limbs boasted of deer-skin leggins with fringe down the sides ; and his body and arms were protected with the famous Kentucky hunting-shirt.

His face was white, however confident an observer, judging from dress, might have been to the contrary. His skin was not brown and weather-beaten like most of the frontier-men, but white and smooth as a female's. Indeed, that broad, drooping hat suffered no sun-rays to enter in upon the face below, and mar its beauty by imbrowning. This man, unlike his fellow-settlers, shielded his face and hands from the winds, the hot sun, and the thorns and briers of the thickets ; and rarely, if ever, engaged in any action that would probably result in a bloody face or torn hands.

He invariably shunned the bear, the panther, or wild-cat, fearing more for his handsome looks than for the preservation of his life. It had often been said in the small settlement, situated south of the river a few miles, that this strange man, Eustace Everard, would have died rather than have received a mark upon his face, or have seen his white hands in an unnatural state.

Standing in the shallow water, upon this beautiful evening, he kept his hat drawn far over his face, and handled his rifle in such a manner as to make it evident that he was searching for a victim to his bullet. Ever and anon his blackish eye swept the opposite shore, now resting here as if trying to penetrate the labyrinth of vegetation or peer through the gloom that was fast filling the woods, then watching closely the whole visible expanse of water, at the same time listening intently for a plash of water or a human voice that would tell him to prepare for a deed most heinously wicked in character.

"Now," he muttered, aiming his rifle out upon the river, "Now, if he were only out there in his canoe, how easily I

could put a bullet into his brain. But, I can wait. My never-failing fortune will turn up in a few moments, and *he* will soon be floating, a dead body down the river, or, what is better, his carcass will make food for the fishes; and that—hist, boy!”

His soliloquy was interrupted by a loud rustling in the willows above him, and somewhat up the stream. In an instant his rifle was lowered from his shoulder, and he entered the concealment at his rear with stillness and celerity. And there he crouched in the water, like a frightened coward, and listened and watched through the leaves.

Again the willows rustled, as of some heavy body dashing recklessly through them; and there was a loud splash of water, so near that the ripples came in before the concealed man's eyes and a few drops of the liquid flew on his hands.

Coward that he was, he sunk lower and deeper into the bushes, not daring to attempt to ascertain the cause of the noise.

His gun lay across his knees, and his hat was pulled down further than before, while his lips twitched strangely and his limbs quivered violently.

For the third time the bushes rustled, and the water splashed and was agitated even up to Eustace Everard's feet. Then there was the sound of a paddle, and immediately following it a light canoe shot out from the shore, containing a single occupant. With a low sound of exultation, the man wearing the slouched hat crept to a position where a better view could be obtained, and examining the priming of his rifle, leveled it at the occupant of the delicate craft.

Had he pulled the trigger of his weapon then, the bullet would have found a lodging-place in the brain of a young man with a fine form and a plain, honest face. He sat in his boat paddling diligently toward the opposite shore, and the faint light of evening showed plainly enough the resemblance he bore to Eustace Everard, the man under the willows. There was the same black hair, though trimmed closely to the head; the dark eyes, though not so piercing and small; the same cast of features in the face, though that face was brown and rough from exposure. In fact, the person in the canoe was Allen Everard, brother to the coward so near with death-dealing weapon in hand and pointed fairly at his head.

Eustace seemed to be wavering upon a determination. Glancing along the barrel of his weapon and covering his brother's head with its sight, he would only touch the trigger, then lower the gun, and while muttering, watch the receding object.

"I feared I could not raise courage enough to fire," he said in a low tone. "My never-failing fortune did not desert me, but I am deserting *it*. I swore that if he crossed here to visit her I would put a bullet into his despised brain!"

As the gloom of night was closing over the river and its surroundings, and inasmuch as the canoe and his brother were now quite distant, Eustace observed that 'twould be a piece of folly to fire at the object of his hate, at present.

"I can wait until he returns homeward," he added, seating himself in a more comfortable position upon a decayed log. "He will return soon, undoubtedly, and I can shoot as correctly by starlight as by sunshine."

Meanwhile the canoe and its propeller neared the other bank, which was rendered dark and dreary by the shadow of the dense wood. Reaching the shore, the young man sprung from the boat, and drew it up under the trees; then he disappeared in the black forest, while his brother silently awaited his return, feeling confident that then he would fire upon him.

One by one the bright stars appeared, until the heavens were reflected as a million diamonds in the broad, flowing Ohio. Eustace waited long, and often moved about discontentedly, and muttered about his "never-failing fortune," (a phrase which had become stereotyped with him,) and ever and anon examined the priming of his rifle.

Now his broad hat was thrown back, revealing a contracted brow that was shaded by the heavy, black locks of hair falling down in confusion.

Perhaps three hours had passed since his brother disappeared, when he sprung to his feet precipitately, and with an eagerness that was at once wild and dreadful in the extreme, dashed the willows from before his face, and gave the other shore a searching gaze. He was confident that he had seen a red, gleaming light at the point landed at by Allen; but so sudden was its appearance, and so suddenly did it vanish, that there was no dependence to be placed on his conjectures.

However, he jerked his hat into its usual position, and with his weapon ready for his brother, whom he supposed to be coming, or at least hoped, he waded clear of the willows and did not halt until the cool water was gurgling around his thighs.

"Thanks to my *never-failing* fortune, he is coming, the dog. He has been courting her, of course, or his stay would not have been so long. I am extremely sorry that he is so closely connected to me; and nothing is more painful to me than the knowledge that he has intruded between me and Edna Wheeler, the only girl I ever can love. Putting him from my path is the only manner in which I can win her, and witnessing his death from my own hands is the very way to be certain that *he is* from my path!"

He watched and waited, and strained his eyes in watching while trying his patience in waiting. Still the shadowy stream was not traversed by any object; nor did the sound of a paddle fall upon his eager ear. With an oath he turned, intending to leave the place, concluding that Allen had crossed higher up, and thinking that some favorable opportunity of committing the deed would be presented him at another time.

But as he turned, his eyes were greeted with the faint outlines of the canoe far over the water. He resumed his position, observing that the boat was speedily drawing near, and heading straight toward him, with his brother's form sitting erect in the stern. Eustace began trembling.

Presently the occupant of the canoe began singing, his voice filled with melody and unmistakable proofs of love. On he paddled, his vocal music reverberating in the woods, unconscious of the fiery eyes that were upon him, and the weapon that was leveled at his head.

"Three cheers for my *never-failing* fortune; it comes around to me at last! Now, Mr. Allen Everard, say your prayers, or go to that other world unforgiven for the harm you have stricken your brother with. You knew that I loved Edna, and you could never have harmed yourself more than by striving to win her from me."

There could not have been a more wicked expression on man's face, than that which clouded Eustace Everard's when

he felt that ere another moment should pass, his brother would be slain, and forever thrust from his path.

His weapon was in readiness, and at the moment he supposed Allen was near enough to allow the shot to prove fatal, he took a long, deliberate aim, and fired.

Allen ended his song with a shriek, and throwing up his arms, fell forward upon his face in the bottom of the canoe. And as the boat suddenly turned and drifted down the stream, Eustace pressed his hat closer over his face, and hurried to the shore, and there dashed into the willows and disappeared.

He had not observed that his brother still held the paddle in his hand, or, perhaps he would not have fled with the firm belief that Allen was dead.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGER AND HIS VALUE.

EUSTACE, the would-be fratricide, was far away through the thickets, fast nearing his home, while the canoe containing Allen was slowly descending the river, with the current.

There was no portion of Allen's body visible save the right hand, which grasped with firmness the idle oar. To one upon either bank of the broad river the boat would have seemed unoccupied, if it could be discovered in the faint starlight at all.

Slowly and silently it drifted down the water with the young man's form lying, face downward, in its protection, and the paddle dragging lazily over one side. After a little time the canoe changed its course, and, instead of heading directly down the stream, it began nearing the southern shore, as if striving to strike a spot where the willows were very sparse, and the water rather shallow.

It really was nearing this point; and as the current ran far out in the river, it would have been reasonable for an observer

to suppose that the occupant of the canoe was still alive, and was desirous of effecting a landing unseen.

A close scrutiny would not have proved fruitless in this respect, for Allen *was* gently working the paddle in such a manner as to propel the boat, and steer it in to shore.

At one time and another he raised his head, ascertaining with swift glances of his keen eyes that he was steering directly toward the spot marked as a landing-place: also assuring himself that no one was watching his actions from the low, nearing shore. When within a few feet of the bank he arose to an upright posture, and, with one determined stroke of the paddle, ran the canoe under the overhanging vegetation.

Securing the craft from being carried away by the action of the water, the wounded youth stepped out among the willows, and, with head upon his breast as if pondering upon some weighty matter, he wended his way toward a level grass-plot above.

There was an unnatural appearance in the way his arm hung at his left side; and there was dark, red blood streamed over the canoe, evincing conclusive evidence that Eustace's shot had resulted in a wound; how serious the hurt was none but the injured could tell.

It appeared to be an ugly bullet-hole, however.

Reaching the open place, where the grass was long and soft, and shadowed by a few tall, august-looking trees, Allen threw his rifle from his shoulder, where he had placed it when leaving the canoe, and seated himself with the air of one who had received a terrible shock, or revelation, and was weak and faint from its effect.

Blood was oozing from and trickling down his left shoulder, and had formed in clots here and there over his garments. His face was extremely white, and his lips quivered with emotion that he could not force back. He flung his skin cap from his head, and pressing his hands upon his damp brow groaned and sighed. Not groans nor sighs of pain from his wound. No; that was nothing in comparison with what he had *seen*!

"To think," he exclaimed, "that my own brother should exert himself to murder me! These are times troublous enough to exempt such enormously wicked deeds as that. To think, to know, to have seen him with my own eyes as I lay

in my canoe, is enough to warrant that he has something to avenge. No ; that is improbable, for I—I have done nothing worthy of his hate."

And here he gave way to deep study, which was only broken at intervals, when he could arrive at no conclusion as to his brother's object in slaying him, by impatient exclamations and nervous moving of his feet. He reclined upon his back, regardless of his wound, and stared at the black star-bedecked sky as if trying to find there a reason for his being the subject of his brother's wrath.

Then he sat upright, and watched the trees in their gentle swaying to and fro ; then he fell upon his face and grasped the long grass with his fingers ; but in all these actions he found no relief.

What would his mother think, and do, when she should hear of this ? He shuddered when he thought of her receiving the news. He knew that she had borne enough sorrow in her life, and he dreaded to have her receive this, which, in comparison, was heavier and greater than all previous afflictions.

He lay here and took a retrospective view of worldly matters. He thought of his former home, toward the ocean, and where civilization was gaining rapidly. He remembered the emigration of their little family, his mother, his brother and himself. He was happy then, and had been up to this day ; but it seemed impossible for him to ever reach the acme of human felicity again ; even when he associated the bright face of Edna Wheeler with his thoughts, he could imagine no such thing as "Happiness."

Long did he remain on the earth, with the murmuring river on one side, and the meadows and miniature forests upon the other, and the great spangled canopy of heaven above him ; and the crimson tide of life was dyeing his garments and the grass about him, flowing from a bullet-hole in the fleshy part of his shoulder.

"Well," he said, looking around him, and rising to his feet as if waking from a troubled slumber, "what can't be cured must be endured. I am shot, and bear the wound ; but were I dying and *he* living, with a prospect of continuing so for many years, I would not exchange places with him. God

pare me such thoughts as he must have fallen into when firing upon me as I was returning from Edna's home."

"Yah, yah, such talk 'll do fur a squaw, young man, but not for me, nor you!" exclaimed a rough voice, much resembling the growl of a bear, and coming from the bushes at Allen's back. There was such strangeness in the gruff answer to his loudly-spoken soliloquy that the young man stood for a moment apparently stunned with astonishment.

Then he turned quickly upon his heel and faced the bushes from whence came the unknown voice.

"Who's there that thus listens to my talk and answers so familiarly? Speak or I fire!" cried he who had been aroused from his soliloquy.

"Ha! ha! youngster, now *don't* shoot. That's a good joke, boy. Look at your weepson. Where is it?" came the same stentorian voice in answer.

Allen suddenly realized his position; his rifle was lying off a few paces upon the ground.

"Don't be scared now, fur I'll not harm a hair of your innocent young head," added the voice; and the leaves rustled, and a big, burly form loomed up in the darkness, with a face half covered with smiles, and half enveloped in hair.

'Twas a broad-shouldered, tough-looking man, with burlesque smiles, but honest face. His dress was the same as Allen's, mostly composed of deer-skin, only more worn and tattered. His stock of weapons consisted of a long rifle thrown carelessly over his shoulder, and a long, keen-looking knife resting in his belt beside a small hatchet.

It took young Everard but a second to learn that the stranger was one of those fervent lovers of the woods, who spend their years in roaming through the wild and beautiful forest, or over the green flower-strewn plains, subsisting upon the game which falls beneath the unerring aim of their rifles.

"Sir," cried Allen, "I am no coward; you do not scare me in the least!"

"I don't want to scare you," and the heavy form came from the bushes and approached the young man, paying little attention to his answering words, and finally seated itself upon the grass. With a twinkling in his eyes he picked up Allen's

rifle and began an examination of its trigger and well-polished barrel.

"Good gun?" he questioned, after some silence.

"Nothing to boast of," answered Allen, ill-naturedly.

"Live near the settlement, eh?" was the second laconic question, in the same thundering tone.

"Yes," rejoined the one interrogated, in a voice full of impatience and observable pain.

"You're wounded, ain't you?" again asked the unknown glancing up at Allen's bloody shoulder.

"Yes; but why do you question me so much? Am I of any interest to you, sir, that you should thus inquire so many times on different things?"

"Brother shot you, hey?" was the cool reply to Allen's hastily-spoken words, which only served to fan the anger that was kindling in his bosom into a fierce heat. With a sudden bound he reached the stranger's side and seized his rifle: and would have sprung away toward his home had not a hand grasped his ankle and thrown him to the earth.

It had been his desire to leave this man, and the place that would ever be stamped upon his memory as the spot where his family name was disgraced, not through fear, but because the questions asked him were becoming disgustingly personal.

He had no malice against the rough but honest-looking stranger; he could not hate him for his impudence, there being such a kind and fatherly expression upon his bearded face; and he endeavored to leave him ere his passion should go beyond his control.

But his endeavors were in vain, as we have seen, and instead of finding himself darting through the thickets, as he had wished, he discovered that his nose and mouth were in rather close proximity to the ground, and that his form was stretched to its full length upon the grass, while the recovered rifle reclined some distance ahead.

Foaming with rage Allen essayed to regain his feet; but the grasp came upon his ankle again, causing him to cease his efforts.

"Now, young man, lay easy. Don't you know there's more'n a dozen o' bloody Injins comin' this way? Listen! Thar they come—I knowed as much. Git your gun up'

foller me if you wants to keep your skulp!" said the man, in an almost inaudible whisper, loosing his grip upon Allen's leg and preparing to crawl away from the open space.

Allen listened as he arose to a sitting posture.

A sound, very faint, resembling the tramping of many feet upon the soft earth, reached his ear. It came from a small but dense collection of oak saplings, and as he inclined his head in that direction it grew louder. Without doubting that the noise came from a party of Shawnees, then infesting that part of the country, he reached for his gun; and having secured it he followed the unknown, who would yet prove to be a valuable friend, despite the eccentricities he possessed and plainly showed.

He discerned the heavy form of the hunter silently and hastily crawling through the willows toward the river, and he did the same thing, though in not so quiet a manner, as he was not so skilled in woodcraft as his newly-formed friend. Yet with caution Allen traversed the ground between the grass-plot and the river without making noise sufficient to arouse the suspicions of the supposed advancing Indians.

"Now, youngster," whispered the hunter, when Allen came to his side on the very edge of the water, at the spot where the canoe had been placed. "Now, youngster, I've got sum' advice fur you to stow away up in your cranium. Listen!—to me, I mean."

Allen promised to give attention to the strange individual's advice, and sat down to hear it.

"Well," began the man, in a very low voice, "I am purty nigh fifty years old, and hev seen a good 'eal of wild life, and hev got more wounds in my time than you've got fingers an' toes, an' hev, may be, tuk more skulps than you've got hairs in your head; but that last I won't sw'ar to, not havin' the skulps handy, and not carin' to count your hair; but never did I in all my born days see a fellow so keerless about a wound, and so reckless in the way he goes about the kedentry." Here he stopped and peered around through the bushes and willows, then continued:

"You're a fool, a keerless, harem-scarem fool! I've see'd you in all your doin's to-night. You made more noise 'an a b'ar when you went to see your gal; and comin' back you

screeched like a wild-cat; and when you left this canoe you went up there and laid and kicked around, and made more noise 'an a baker's dozen o' Injins in a skulp-dance."

Allen could do nothing but laugh silently at his companion's exaggerated reprimand, and felt that he had been very much in the wrong when he grew angry at the old fellow's odd sayings and actions.

"Proceed, my friend, I feel that I *have* been rather hasty in my actions of late," said he, as the hunter dropped his head and seemed lost in reflection.

"Never do you, in your life ag'in, go so long with that kind o' wound in hot weather; and *never*—"

The night-air, and solemn stillness was pierced by a loud cry, resembling that of a wolf, so close and so startling, that Allen sprung involuntarily to his feet, and stared at his friend in bewilderment.

The howl, long and loud, was echoed in the hills over and over again; then answered far down the river by a similar cry. Hardly had these sounds died away, when the bushes above our two friends rustled, and the stealthy tread of an Indian was heard coming down toward their place of concealment!

CHAPTER III.

EUSTACE AS A RENEGADE.

TAKING the license of a writer, we shift the scene, in order to follow Eustace after his hasty departure from the river. Three miles due south of the stream was a rude hut of logs. It nestled in the very heart of a dense forest, and, consequently, was rarely rendered pleasant-looking by sunbeams or the bright light of day. Yet this spot, with its gloominess, and any thing but attractive appearance, was fixed upon by Allen as the site for their home. And he had erected the cabin unassisted by Eustace; and it was with proud feelings that he conducted his aged mother to its humble shelter, and

told her that henceforth they would live under its roof, striving to be happy the while.

Unmindful of the howling of the winds through the mighty trees, caring not for the shadowy light that ever rested around their home, and paying little attention to the wanderings of Eustace at times, Allen and his mother lived in comfort and happiness.

As if in deathly slumber the cabin lay beneath the towering monarchs of the forest, so sheltered that the twinkling stars shone not upon it, and so concealed that the keenest eye could not have discerned its outlines. Even Eustace, as he groped his way through the wood, halted time and again, and strained his eyes to get a glimpse of it; and 'twas not until after he had ran against the tree-trunks several times in succession that he placed his hand upon the door.

"Mother," he called in a low voice. "Mother, let me in. Come now, do hurry along, for I am tired."

"Who is it?" came a feminine voice in answer.

"'Tis I, Eustace; let me in."

"Yes," and as she replied she threw open the door and gave admittance to her son. "Come in, come in," she continued, endeavoring to see his face, "and I will light up the room with this torch."

"Never mind the light now; I can find it easily enough without," answered he, groping in one corner of the small room. "I can find it, I can find it!"

The mother heeded not his words, but ignited a piece of resinous wood, and holding the glaring light over her head she watched, with feelings of distrust and sadness, the actions of her son.

"Find what, Eustace? You will find what?" she asked, laying a hand upon his shoulder.

With a sudden start, he turned his white, shaded face toward the motherly, anxious one behind him, and said, in a voice full of terror:

"Nothing, nothing of any consequence. Only—" he grasped something from the corner, and holding it aloft over his mother's gray head, continued—"only this!"

'Twas nothing more, nor nothing less, than a huge, gleaming knife, and as the mother saw it glittering overhead, and

observed the white but wicked-looking face of her son, & uttered a low scream and sunk back upon the floor. He was gone when she arose, having darted like an evil spirit through the doorway, and sunk into the darkness without.

She knew too well the nature of that son ; and even when *he* was but a babe, she had seen its flagitiousness made manifest in none other than his father, her husband. That Eustace inherited a disposition from his father, and that that disposition was one of extreme wickedness, she and Allen knew.

And when she saw him, wild and weird as he looked, raise that long, death-dealing weapon, she at once understood that he was stirred, and that nothing but death itself could prevent him from treading the path his father had traversed before him.

But she did not know, nor suspect, what he had already attempted—she had visions of villainous deeds, but none that tended toward such a crime as fratricide.

She imagined him as a renegade ; she thought of him as a destroyer of human lives and an enemy of civilization, and placed him in rank with Simon Girty and McKee, yet thought not of his *true* designs.

But, reader, let us follow Eustace, and discover his object in coming to the cabin and obtaining possession of the ugly weapon. Again, with slouched hat, he groped his way among the trees, muttering his stereotyped phrase, and holding the knife with a nervous clutch.

His course did not tend toward the river, but west, parallel with it ; and for more than an hour he advanced without changing his direction.

“Now,” he muttered, grinding his teeth like an angry beast, and falling into one of his moods of soliloquy, “I am free ! Never again will I enter that hut and look *her* in the face. I’d rather face an earthquake or a thousand demons than to look into my mother’s old white face again. Wouldn’t it be much better if a fellow had no mother ? Then his ways would not be trampled upon by little lectures and scoldings ! Ever since I have lived, she has watched me with a strange eye, and has always tried to pry into my doings. Why should she do thus, and allow *Allen* to go his way as he feels disposed ?”

How like a child he talked and reasoned !

How full of respect for his aged mother were his words ; yet how wickedly his eyes gleamed, and how blackly his face looked, despite the clear skin !

He was still muttering, much in the manner of one insane when far through the blackness he saw a light, red and glaring like the eye of a maddened brute. It did not surprise him. He had expected it, and his steps were quickened toward it, while he muttered.

Like a dark wood-demon he pressed on, with a tread that was stealthy and feline, and halted not until he came upon the fire which had been observed far back.

Here he saw the scene of which he had been in search.

'Twas a blazing fire of fagots, whose glare shot out upon the surrounding trees, and up in their green foliage, and on the red faces of a party of Indians. The latter were squatting here and there over the ground, some smoking and others looking stoically at the fire, while one, very tall and with lofty mien, stood against a tree ; and while he kept his arms folded over his breast, he continually let his eyes wander out into the darkness.

Eustace had come up so silently that even the quick ears of the Indians did not detect any unusual noise.

As he stepped within the circle of light, the tall Indian observed him, and without any change in his stony look, left his position ; and he and Eustace met in the midst of the scene and shook hands.

Simultaneously the others sprung to their feet ; and then followed a low conversation between the white man and the lofty-looking savage (who was, undoubtedly, the chief of the little band), during which they made many gestures, and Eustace showed his terrible-looking knife.

The chief ran his finger along its keen edge and nodded his head complacently. Then they talked louder, and Eustace shook hands with every member of the band, said members indulging in " ughs " and " waghhs " to their entire satisfaction ; and, after a little, a pipe was lighted, and as they all squatted, it was passed from mouth to mouth, each taking a few whiffs.

All this made it clear that the fire had been made as a guide

for Eustace to their camp; and that in accordance with some previous agreement, the white was to become one of their number, and assist them in a little piece of deviltry planned by himself.

In point of fact, Eustace Everard was now a *renegade*!—and quite a paragon of renegades he made!

After a few remarks in the Shawnee language from the chief, the whole party arose, and while two of the band were scattering the fire, the others were making preparations to leave the place.

Each savage was the happy possessor of a rifle, a knife, and the indispensable tomahawk. Eustace carried his rifle and knife, but these looked not as treacherous and criminal as his half-covered face.

In single file they left the scattered fire, going into the darkness with thoughts in good keeping with the deathly stillness of the night, and making their way toward the river. The hour was nearing midnight when the band came in view of the stream.

Halting in a collection of saplings, at the signal of the chief, Eustace said, in a low tone:

"Red-pole, my plan is this: I have shot him—he is dead, and consequently the canoe containing his body will drift down the river."

"The brother's boat may come to shore or wash in the willows," answered Red-pole, as Eustace hesitated.

"Well, suppose it should; my never-failing fortune will not allow it to escape my eyes. But, to continue: the best thing is to let your men separate and hunt up and down the banks, and look over the water."

Red-pole nodded his plumed head, but hardly seemed satisfied with his interlocutor's words.

"And," continued the renegade, pulling his hat further over his face, "should any of the men discover any thing, he must give the cry of the wolf, and the others may reply with a similar howl, denoting that they will come!"

The chief cast his eyes upon the ground and muttered some equivocal reply, unheard by the white.

"Then," added Eustace, suddenly jerking the huge knife from his belt, "after all are assembled around his corpse, he

that is the bravest shall have the honor of using *this* weapon in removing *his* scalp !”

The lofty-looking Indian smiled contemptuously.

“ When his black scalp shall hang at an Indian's belt, and we have consigned his body to the fishes and have wiped his blood off this pretty knife, then our steps shall lead us to Edna Wheeler's house, where our easy prey awaits, and where ripe fruit will fall into our hands.”

“ Now the Long-knife speaks well !” exclaimed the savage, looking upon the shaded face with glittering eyes. “ Come, let us go. We have no time to lose.”

After a few words to the party of half-naked savages behind him, Red-pole darted away, down the river.

One by one his followers left the spot, some with rapid steps and others with slow and measured tread, until Eustace was alone. Nothing around him but the silent trees and the murmuring river, and the bright stars far away. It was not his intention to be left alone. He dreaded to be with nothing save his thoughts and the ever-warning voice of nature.

Cowardly villains shun solitude and darkness, generally, even when mortal enemies are in the distance.

So unexpected was the departure of his companions in sin that Eustace was at a loss for some moments to know what to do.

His first impulse was to follow the chief ; his next to remain where he was ; his third to climb one of the small trees and watch and wait. He acted upon neither, but directed his steps toward the spot in the water where he had stood when shooting Allen, intending to remain there until the imitated cry of the wolf should be heard.

Once more the interlacing vegetation was before that partly-masked visage, and again the wicked eyes looked out upon the starlit waters, and his fingers worked around the handle of the terrible knife.

“ Now,” he said, in his low way, “ if my never-failing fortune does not desert me, and it's any thing but right to suppose it will, Allen Everard's scalp will soon be hanging against the flesh of a live savage !”

Here he listened intently, thinking he had heard the far-off cry of an exultant red-skin—a cry that would tell him the time

was come to use the "pretty little scalp-knife"—but he soon concluded that he was mistaken.

"Mother will—ha ! mother ! how strange that word sounds in my ear ! Mother—I say she will feel sorry when she hears of Allen's death ; but she will get over the shock ; such things are common out here. Yes, they are very common, so very common," and he gazed down in the shallow water with an almost repentant look.

How little he thought that his brother was below him so short a distance, resting under the willows like himself, still blessed with life and vigor.

"Hark !" he muttered, as if silencing some one at his side. "There it goes—that wolf-howl ! Good !"

For he had heard the wild cry which had so startled Allen and interrupted the stranger while giving advice.

As a hound springs forward when loosed to the chase, Eustace left his position, and, getting upon clear ground, darted down the river-bank, holding his rifle in one hand and the knife in the other.

CHAPTER IV.

A SHOT AND A THRUST FOR THE CAUSE.

"DOWN, boy, an' fur your life be still !" whispered the hunter, as Everard sprung to his feet, at the wild cry above. The young man obeyed the order by crouching far under the willows, scarcely allowing himself to breathe.

Step by step the Shawnee—for an Indian it truly was—descended the declivitous bank of the river. He had heard the stranger's voice, and advanced, parting the bushes carefully, listening and scrutinizing with all the acuteness of his nature.

The two below heard his tread, as previously mentioned, and even more. The air was resonant with howls, similar to that of a wolf, some very near, and others far down the river, while the crash of the thickets and muffled sounds of hurrying feet proclaimed approaching enemies.

Allen's canoe rested lightly upon the water, the action of

the current moving it to and fro in such a manner as to bring its stern in contact with the overhanging limbs of the dwarf-willows, occasionally giving rise to a slight noise much resembling in its complication a very faint *sneeze*!

The youth essayed to put a stop to this little betrayer; but the finger of the older warned him against it. The savage was still coming, though the fiendish yells had ceased and the rustling of the vegetation hushed, more or less. Eventually the boat gave a lunge and struck the surrounding branches quite smartly, causing a much louder "sneeze" than before.

The stealthy step ceased immediately, the observance of which throwing an impatient look over the face of Allen's friend.

'Twas quite evident, from the old man's eyes and face, and the way he handled the knife at his belt, that, should the savage fail to appear, the hunter would be greatly disappointed. So eager was he to drive his knife into the red-skin's bosom and secure his scalp, that he uttered a low groan as if in great pain, thus hoping to draw his enemy in view, and within reach of his arm.

Allen was surprised, and had it upon his tongue to admonish his companion into silence. If there was only one savage it would be nothing more than right to put him from their path, but it was safe enough to venture that the enemy was powerful and numerous, and it would require great caution to keep them from rushing into their hiding-place.

The old man continued to utter low groans, greatly to Allen's consternation; and in a very short time the form of the Indian stepped down silently before them.

His quick eye fell upon the canoe in the darkness; but he failed to discern the two forms blending with the gloom. He stooped and grasped the oar that lay in the boat, and leaning upon it he looked out upon the river.

The larger of the two behind him was not idle, in the meantime. He arose, and moved toward the dusky enemy with more stillness and celerity than his heavy body would have indicated. There was a something bright in his hand, and something strangely terrible in his eyes, the former being his knife, and the latter his inveterate hatred for an Indian.

Allen grasped his gun, in readiness for any use put before

him, while his eyes watched the proceedings of his hunter friend. The crashing of bushes had entirely ceased, yet there seemed to be footsteps on the open ground above, and it was easy to imagine that persons were holding a conference in the neighborhood.

There were enemies above—Eustace and Red-pole having met here, where the first signal had been given, and the remainder of the band joining them—and they were conversing as to the disappearance of the Indian, little dreaming that he was marked for a fatal thrust of the hunter's knife.

Allen listened to the voices, which sounded much like the falling of forest-leaves, but could catch no words, although he discovered that there was one who spoke English.

The unsuspecting Indian stood leaning upon the paddle, the green leaves mingling with the plumes in his head, and his eyes gazing on the water beyond.

The burly form was immediately behind him, and was in the act of striking a blow with his knife, when the red-skin stooped again, and replaced the paddle, with such silence that his friends heard him not.

The hunter had crouched to the earth.

After looking again upon the river as if reluctant to leave it, the savage turned to go up the slope.

His eyes fell upon the dark figure before him, drawn down like a panther preparing to spring, and he opened his mouth to cry out. But he never uttered a sound; the form leaped upon him with fierceness. Allen saw an outward motion and the gleam of the knife, then a rapid inward thrust, and the Indian sunk forward into the white's arms!

With the quickness and stillness of a spirit, he lowered the dead body of the savage into the shallow water, the red blood pouring over his garments. Replacing the bloody weapon in his belt, he lifted a huge stone (which seemed impossible for him to stir) from its bed; and pushing the corpse of the red-man into deeper water, placed it upon the quiet breast, and held it there until both were lying at the bottom of the river.

Rendered hideous by the crimson stains upon his person, he returned to Allen, and whispered:

“Guess he'll never come up ag'in till I choose to move that

stone and take his scalp, which'll be about to-morrer mornin', eh?"

Allen shuddered; and in an almost inaudible voice, called his companion's attention to the voices above.

"I've heerd 'em, boy, an' I'll fix 'em. Now, ef you'll take particular notice of me, you'll see sumthin' that'll su'prise you. Look now!"

And to suit his words, the stranger unfastened the canoe, and springing in, he sat down and commenced paddling away, whispering as he departed:

"Be easy till I come ag'in—I'm only goin' to give 'em a wild-goose chase an' then return. Take care o' yerself now, sonny. Good-by!"

Driven by the strong and skillful strokes of the paddle, the canoe sped out from the covert, soon passing from the sight of the young man.

With that perspicacity characteristic of Indian-fighters and adventurers, the hunter, whose name was yet unknown to Allen, had guessed the object of the savages' proceedings. That they were searching for the supposed corpse of the young man whose friendship he had gained, and that their wolf-like clamor was in some manner connected with that quest, so directed by the villainous brother, he was confident.

Knowing that the red-skins had assembled near their place of concealment, drawn thither by the first startling cry, and feeling sure that his appearance would lead them away, he paddled fearlessly out upon the water, with hopes of eluding them if chase should be given.

Here, perhaps, we may opportunely record that the old man had been a witness to the proceedings of Eustace Everard in his attempt to murder his brother, and had seen Allen's fall, and his landing upon the shore.

"There he goes! Look—it is Allen! his spirit!" was the wild speech of Eustace, as the hunter's canoe came within view of those on the bank. "He is not mortal now—don't shoot, Red-pole!" he added, on seeing the chief raise his gun at the dim figure on the water.

Suddenly the occupant of the canoe dropped his paddle and seized his rifle, springing to his feet so hurriedly as to very nearly overturn the light craft.

"You ugly, mean, cowardly, sneakin' white man you're ten times meaner 'an an Injun! Try to kill your brother, eh? Well, here's a pill fur you. No pay, if no cure," roared the hunter. And ere the group upon the bank could fly to cover, a bright jet of fire shot out in the gloom, the report that followed ringing simultaneously with an exclamation from Eustace.

But Eustace was unhurt, although he was intended for the victim of the shot. The bullet whizzed in close proximity to his head, striking a savage at his rear in the brain, laying him out lifeless, with no utterance save that of the death-rattle.

Fatal as the shot had been, the hunter regretted that, instead of slaying the Indian, his bullet had not sent the renegade deathward. His aim had been at Eustace, but the imperfect light rendered it faulty.

"Consarn the luck!" he exclaimed, coolly reloading his weapon, as the current slowly removed him further and further from the southern shore. "I missed him, the sinner! Ef there's any thing I do hate worser 'an a red-man, it's a white renegade, who puts Injuns up to all kinds o' wickedness."

And having thus relieved himself, and having finished the loading of his gun, he took up the paddle again, and drove the craft toward the densely-wooded shore.

The Indians and the renegade were so startled at the sudden vicissitude of affairs, that for some moments they gazed alternately at the still form of their companion and the figure that was gradually blending with the dark shadows of the forest beyond.

Eventually Eustace fired a shot, but with no favorable effect, the hunter's rough laugh coming in answer over the river. This angered several of the red-skins, and they fired as one would fire at a faint shadow upon a distant wall, but owing to their ignorance in regard to rifle-shooting, perhaps, the bold white disappeared unhurt. And long after he had gone from sight they heard his mocking laugh.

'Twas quite clear from the actions of the renegade and Red-pole, that the former was puzzled, although the latter was not. Eustace argued that the occupant of the canoe could have been no other than his brother, yet the voice and large form set his words at naught. Red-pole said that the dead

brother had floated far down the river ere this, and that he whom they had just seen was a great and terrible hunter, and the most feasible plan now was to procure their canoes and make all haste toward the house containing the beautiful pale-face.

Eustace patiently listened to the chief's long speech ; then poured out his disappointment fluently. It had been his wish to see that his brother was dead—to feel with his own hand that his heart had ceased beating, and he could not give up the search so soon.

Allen heard distinctly every word of his brother's harangue, and the sadness that lay in his heart now sped away, and a fierce, fiery hatred for his relative took its place. He heard their plans, their decisions, and in them learned that which aroused him ; and he resolved that Edna Wheeler should never be under his brother's control so long as he lived. He would have no more of this sighing and retrospective dreaming—he would steel his heart and battle with the appalling reality, even going so far as to slay Eustace, if necessary.

He had found a friend—one whom he knew to be brave and noble-hearted—and with his help this black, enveloping cloud should be driven away to allow the bright sun of happiness to shine upon them.

He crouched in the bushes, with emotions that he had never before felt, and listened, while his friend was out of danger. There was much talking between the chief and Eustace, now and then interrupted by the interposition of the remainder of the band, who were growing impatient over the long argument.

Their debate at last closed with this question from Eustace, who was starting away :

“ But, Red-pole, where is the one who gave the signal at this point, and went down in these bushes ? ”

“ True ! Where is he ? ” was the quick answer.

Allen heard some one coming down the slope, rattling the bushes ! He grasped his knife, determined to thrust it into the first person who should see him.

The willows parted a little to the left of him, and a dusky, half-clad form stepped lightly before him, with eyes searching the earth. He did not see Allen. There was something red

upon the earth, and on the surface of the water, that riveted his gaze. 'Twas blood ; and as he made this discovery, he uttered a mournful howl, and left the place with a slow step.

"He is dead—his blood waters the roots of the little trees—he is in the river, as food for the fish," said the chief to his followers, as he emerged from the bushes. Whereupon the savages all uttered in chorus a dismal cry—dismal enough to raise the dead Shawnee out of his watery grave, Allen thought.

At last they departed, and Allen came out from his concealment and watched them until hidden by the luxuriant vegetation bordering the river. In less than a half-hour he saw them in canoes, skimming across the water like shadows of death.

He could not take his eyes from them until the great forest swallowed them up. He turned away, well knowing that upon the next day, or night, the home of his love would be fallen upon by his brother and the little band of Shawnees.

CHAPTER V.

PLANNING AND ACTING.

REACHING a spot sheltered from the dew and hidden from the view of any one who might possibly pass, young Everard reclined upon the grass and began considering the propriety of indulging in a short nap.

The wound in his shoulder was growing painful, and remembering the words of the hunter in regard to his neglecting it, he gave up the idea of sleeping, and proceeded to examine the effect of Eustace's bullet.

To his joy he discovered that the bullet had not lodged in his shoulder, having just cut deeply into the flesh and sped on. Tearing his shirt from the wounded part, he made a closer examination, and sighed with relief on finding that it was nothing serious.

However, he crept to the river and washed away the clotted

blood, and bathed the swollen flesh with the cool, refreshing water. Then bound up the wound with damp leaves of medicinal properties, and returned to his former position and threw himself upon the earth.

The stillness around him was like that of a tomb. The only sounds that fell upon his ear, were the gentle ripple of the Ohio, and the hollow murmurs of the forest on the opposite side of the river.

These, perhaps, soothed him into a pleasant slumber. He dreamed of happy events, the most prominent of which was his meeting with Edna Wheeler, whose face shone upon him like an angel's as he told her there was no danger to be apprehended, and that the black cloud had been blown away. They wandered down to the river-bank, hand in hand, he thought, and their vows were renewed while looking on a scene of loveliness.

But soon he felt something cold falling upon his face, and he awoke to find, instead of a bright sunny day, a chilly, rainy morning. 'Twas a short time ere he could realize his position, but it all came to him soon enough, and springing to his feet he looked around him in hopes of seeing his friend.

Dawn was appearing amidst the drizzly rain, while the sky was overcast with leaden clouds. The earth was damp, and the river muddy, plainly showing that the rain had been heavier and must have commenced shortly after his falling asleep.

In vain Allen searched the other shore, and the river, the bushes, and the scenes around him, in hopes of discovering that large, honest face.

His heart almost sunk within him when considering how narrow his chances of assisting Edna would be without the help of the experienced woodman.

He knew he would not shrink from danger, yet it would be impossible for him to trail the Indians should circumstances necessitate such an undertaking.

"I have a notion to cling to a log, and cross over, seeing I now have no canoe," he said, still looking on the river. "But once over there I can not do much, knowing so little in regard to the wiles and traps of the savage foe."

"You'll l'arn! You'll make a roarin' hunter yit!" replied a voice, very familiar, and full of humor.

Allen turned his eyes about him, but could see no one. The voice came again :

" You've jes' got the spunk, youngster, you hev, to make a good, honest old Injun-killer."

" Where are you, friend?" exclaimed Allen, looking at every point likely to contain the form of the hunter. " Come, show yourself, and let us shake hands, and be friends forevermore."

" That I will, my boy!" heartily cried the old man, appearing as if from the ground. " That I will, and be powerful glad to be your friend. Now I'll tell you; last night when I see'd you lyin' out there moaning and sighin' 'bout that mean brother o' your'n, I concluded 'ut you was a baby; but you're improvin', you're gittin' on!"

And he and Allen clasped hands, shaking them for some time, the hunter talking all the while.

" Well, now fur your name. What is it?" asked he of the young man, his bearded face full of smiles.

" Allen Everard. I live back here in this wood a few miles. I am sorry that things have been going so that we could not exchange names, nor even converse."

" I hardly understand you; but s'pose you want my handle. Well, it's simply Ham—old Ham—sum'times Ham the Injun-fighter, then ag'in, Hunter Ham. As we will, maybe, pass a few days together, suppose you call me *Ham*, and leave off the rest, fur I don't like it, 'cause it's too stylish-like."

" I will address you as Ham, and hope our days of companionship will be as numerous as leaves upon the trees. I am happy to call you a friend, as I have heard very often of you as a remarkable trailer, and trust you will assist me in keeping a certain maid from my brother's wolfish clutch. I suppose, Ham, you are well acquainted with the facts of the present trouble," replied Allen, looking into his friend's merry eyes.

" In sure I is well acquainted with the facts. How could I help it, layin' as I did over yonder, seein' your brother aimin' at you, and hearin' him mutter as he did."

" Course I am awar' that a girl is in the mix. I am powerful awar' o' that; and, judgin' from the way the renegade an' the Injuns scudded over thar las' night, I'll sw'ar that this very comin' night will find 'em sneakin' around the house, watchin' fur a chance to rush in, grab her up, an' kil' old man Wheeler."

"Then you know Mr. Wheeler and his daughter?" cried the younger, with eagerness.

"Know 'em! Well, I reckon I duz! The old man an' me, you see, used to hunt together when little chaps. But that was lng ago, and not out here, lad. 'Twas fur up this river, where them hills grow into mountains, and there was purtier scenes 'an these, though these is purty enough fur anybody. An' his girl, too; I used to set her on my knee an' tell her Injun stories until she would cry an' put her little arms around my neck an' ask me to drive off any red-skins that might be comin'."

"Then can I hope for you to help me in saving her from a horrible fate, and her father from death?"

"Hope? Thur's no use in hopin'. When old Ham has a friend he stands by him until death. Sartinly you can hev me as help; but don't never say hope ag'in afore me; thur's no use in hopin' allus. We must lay that aside an' pitch right in an' cut an' slash."

"Thanks, Ham, thanks. Now what is our first duty?" said Allen, preparing for immediate departure.

"Your first duty, Allen Evermore," replied the hunter, "is to eat sum breakfast. Your second duty—" here he laid his brawny hand upon Allen's shoulder—"is to go an' see your mother an' git her put in the block-house, 'cause Injuns ain't any too skeerce, nowadays; then *our* duty are this: to stop this lettle storm 'ut your brother is stirrin' up."

"The first-named duty I could readily fulfill had I any thing to eat. But having nothing, I must perform the second."

"Cracky! Evermore, can't you shoot? Don't you know the use of your gun? Sumthin' to eat are flyin' around us all the time. Look! thur goes a flock of ducks. Thur, they lit right down whur I landed this mornin'," responded the hunter seeing some aquatic fowls flying up the river, and leaving Allen, in order to procure one of them for their meal.

Ham disappeared in the bushes, and not long-after the spiteful crack of his rifle sounded upon the morning air; and soon he returned, bearing in his hand a lifeless duck. Hardly had he reached Allen's side when a half-dozen or more of wild turkeys went skimming along the ground, their wings spread and feet barely touching the earth.

"Shoot, my lad, shoot!" exclaimed Ham.

Allen fired, and succeeded in bringing to the grass a fine fat hen, which now made the prospects for a meal quite favorable. Ham's labors soon resulted in a fire, and the birds were prepared and roasted.

"Isn't there some danger in having a fire, my friend, when we are so surrounded by enemies?" asked Allen, as they were regaling themselves upon the savory meat before them. "Won't some one see the blaze?"

"Danger? No!" rejoined the "Injun-fighter," in a voice of thunder. "Some people think that there's not a single tree in the woods but what's got an Injun ahind it, and that a white man can't do nothin' but what a whole tribe o' red-men will jump on him an' pound him to nothin'. That's bosh; do as ye please, an' common sense will help you out. No one's a-goin' to see this fire, unless it's them reds yonder with your consarned brother; but they saw me come over here, an' 'll hardly bother me. That reminds me of what I hearn you brother say, las' night."

"What was it?" inquired Allen, quickly.

"Why, you see, I'd landed on t'other shore, an' was hid under a tree; an', expectin' to see your relation an' them Injuns come acrost, I laid still. You saw 'em cross over, I guess? Well, they landed right whar I did, an' passed within a foot of me; an' as they went by like a parcel o' shadders, your brother said that he was sure you was dead, an' all the powers on earth or in heaven couldn't change him in his thinkin' so."

"Let him harm a hair of Edna Wheeler's head, and he shall learn the truth with such certainty that he can never assert to the contrary. Let him harm the sweetest being upon this earth, and ere another sun sets his black career shall be forever ended!" cried the injured brother, springing to his feet with a white face, and anger expressed in every look. "Oh, sir, you know not how I hate him now, if you never held malice toward a brother!"

"Don't I though? Take care! I've held more mallets toward a brother, an' knocked him on the head more times than yon tree's got leaves. He used to do the choppin' at home, you see, an' me the splittin'. I've many a time got mad an'

cracked him over the mug with my mallet wh . he was workin', an'—"

"Was that all my brother said?" interrupted All A, hardly appreciating Ham's story.

"Yaas, that's all—but please don't shut me up in that manner ag'in, or I'll be hanged if I don't go fur you! As I was a-sayin', my brother was workin' an' whistlin', an' full o' love fur—"

"Did the party journey toward Wheeler's cabin?" again interposed Allen, thinking more of the danger surrounding his loved one, Edna, than of Ham's early life.

"Snakes! Can't you let a feller tell 'bout his own brother, boy? Course they went to'ard Wheeler's cabin. Full tilt, ready fur a tussle, too. Renegade, he looked wild; he kep' his big hat down over his whole face. Talked foolish about luck—or fortin 'at would never fail, in short! Had a big knife in his hand, a gun over his shoulder, an' a sneakin' way o' trottin' along, wickedder than his weepens."

"Enough, Ham. Now for our second duty."

"Yaas! I could 'a' sp'iled his complexion easy; but left that job fur you to execute. S'pose you'll fotch him up a-standin', youngster, when you lay your hands on that long ha'r o' his'n, eh?" continued the hunter, rising from the fire, and shaking the rain off him like a huge dog. "Jest wait hyar, boy, till I goes down an' raises that Injun's ha'r that we left las' night in the river."

Allen was alone the next moment, Ham going toward the spot where he had lowered the lifeless form of the red-man the night before. Allen felt much better now. The wound was not worth noticing, the repast he had just partaken of was strengthening, and the fire threw out a pleasant warmth into the damp, chilly atmosphere. He looked around him, upon the diversified scene spread before him, its beauty and brightness half-concealed by the falling mist, and reflected again how much this resembled his own existence: first, a sunny, bright day, full of singing-birds and love; then, a dark, dreadful night, overflowing with bloodshed, and its black air rent by the threats and horrible plans of his own brother. Inference—a day of tears, with the beauty of the past rendered almost invisible by a vail; the present looking straight into the

future, where more blood was to be spilled—brother against brother !

He turned his face from the wood that contained Edna's home, and leaned his head against a tree, feeling faint for a moment. But Hunter Ham's cheerful though rough voice aroused him. On turning, he beheld hanging at the belt of the hunter a bunch of long, coarse black hair, dripping with muddy water.

" Oh, come, Ham ; let us hurry to reach our cabin and the settlement, then get upon the rescue-march before afternoon," said Allen, turning away from the scalp, and facing the settlement.

" Arternoon ! Humph, Allen Everglade, them Injuns an' your brother 'll not dare to come a-near old man Wheeler's hole afore dark. Them reds are well acquainted with the old man's shootin'-iron, an' know durned well that his gal kin shoot too. So don't think o' goin' over thar till plum dark," replied Ham, leisurely seating himself before the fire ; and taking out an old pipe, he filled it and began smoking, seeming to enjoy the warmth of the blaze as greatly as one might on being lost in a fierce snow-storm, among the northern wilds. He warmed his hands, his feet, his entire body ; then leaned back against a grim old oak, and, shutting his eyes, puffed away upon his little black pipe, enveloping his merry face in a cloud of smoke.

Seeing that further talk would be utterly useless, Allen quietly left the place, resolved to remove his mother to a safer home, and return with all haste, with the hope of finding the hunter in the same position. With a firm step he plunged into the woods that held their little home, thinking not of danger around him, but of that enshrouding Edna Wheeler, the maid loved by him and Eustace.

CHAPTER VI.

ALLEN'S LEAP.

WITH permission, we will leave Ham, the hunter, and follow in the hastily-made tracks of Allen. Let the eccentric Indian-fighter enjoy the cheerful fire and the blue clouds of smoke puffed from his mouth, and learn the fruits of the youth's departure.

Allen soon became unmindful of the dreary gloom prevalent in the grand forest. Thoughts of Edna Wheeler's pure face and the danger surrounding her preyed upon his caution, as well. With his eyes cast upon the earth, only slightly raised when encountering a dense clump of undergrowth, he hurried onward.

The drizzly rain hardly penetrated the rich canopy overhead, save here and there where the foliage was thinner; yet he could not dispel the gloom and chill.

He wondered if *she* still would love him after learning Eustace's true and wicked character. If he, Eustace, should succeed in the plan he had laid before Red-pole—should tear her from her home and force her to become his wife—could Edna, as of yore, love his brother? Would there remain a spark of hope after the disgrace thrown upon their name by Eustace?

"I fear not," he said, shaking his head, mournfully. "Oh, I fear not! She can not do otherwise than loathe the very name of Everard. Still, perhaps I may prove myself worthy of her—I can rescue her from his grasp—I can save her from an awful fate, and then—then I will learn the truth!"

He walked steadily on, deeper and deeper into the dark wood, entertaining no fears of the red foe that ever lurked here among the dense and wild scenes; and thinking little, apparently, of meeting such enemies.

But there were eyes upon his handsome form, and stealthy steps in his rear. Three dark forms, rendered darker in appearance by the almost total exclusion of daylight, were flitting hither and thither behind him.

Allen trudged on, his thoughts still of Edna, unconscious of the jeopardy hovering near.

He had advanced thus for, perhaps, a half-hour, the shadow-like forms following him, when he caught his foot in a projecting root, and fell heavily to the earth. His rifle shot from his hand like a liberated bird and landed at the edge of a deep gully, some feet away, then commenced rolling, and did not cease until it reached a little stream far down among the long, trailing vines and bushes.

In springing hastily to his feet, the youth cast his eyes involuntarily backward. 'Twas fortunate that he did so ; for at that instant an Indian leaped from the cover of a tree and raised his tomahawk to hurl it at his head !

Like an arrow Allen sped to the nearest tree, the savage's weapon whistling over his shoulder.

Then, as his form was hidden by the huge trunk of the forest-monarch, the solitude was broken by blood-curdling yells from the three red-skins. Shuddering, the youth peeped around his protection, and saw to his horror the number he would be forced to contend with. Three to one !

In possession of his rifle he would stand a much better chance, but as it was, certain death would be the result of a contest. On they came, yelling and screeching, bounding over fallen logs, dashing madly through thickets, breaking through the tangled vines, every instant bringing on death.

His knife—could he not use it in defense ? Questioning himself, he reached his hand to his belt for the weapon ; but it was gone ; having become parted from his person when his foot had struck the root ! Was there no hope ?

He looked quickly over the place where he had fallen, and after some search with his eyes, he saw the knife among the rank weeds. Could he leap from the tree and obtain the weapon ere the savages were upon him ? They were not ten yards off, yet he aroused the courage that was sinking to such a low ebb, and sprung before the enemies' eyes and grasped the knife. As he bounded back to the oak, a bullet passed in dangerous proximity to his head, shot from the rifle of one of the yelling trio.

While in quest of the knife, at a glance he had seen that one savage was a few feet ahead of the other two, and held

nothing but a knife, having thrown his tomahawk, and dropped his gun upon the ground behind him.

Knowing that his life depended upon his coolness and bravery, Allen endeavored to become calm during the few seconds before the foremost Indian reached him. He thought of Edna and his own mother now, and breathed a hasty prayer that he might be spared to protect them.

But now came the crisis. The nearest savage was upon him, with knife raised for the contest, and eyes glittering like those of a snake. As the youth saw the crested head, he suddenly sprung around the opposite side of the tree; and as the red-skin uttered a howl on not seeing his enemy, Allen drove his long, keen weapon to the haft into the bare back before him!

The enemy, thus struck so unceremoniously in the rear, shrieked like some unearthly demon, and sunk forward at the roots of the tree.

Allen had no time to stand aghast at the deed he had done—there was no time for regrets—for the remaining savages were only a pace or two in the background, one with uplifted hatchet, the other with clubbed rifle.

Leaving the knife in the dying Indian, Allen sped away like a deer. But he did not run far. He had forgotten the deep ravine, wherein his gun had been thrown, and he stood upon its very brink ere he remembered it. The two red foes were immediately behind him; to turn from the gully would be to rush into their arms; to leap down into the vines and bushes would only wound him; now, which *must* he do?

"Death here, rather than by fire!" he cried; and the next moment he leaped from the ground and went whirling down, down through the rushing air, crashing in the bushes, now clutching at the vines, now hanging for a moment, then down, down again, bouncing, rolling, catching, until his form reached the little stream of water. There it lay, still and bruised, the handsome face upturned, the cap fallen from his head, and the glossy black hair floating in short curls upon the water, and his hands and arms thrown wildly out.

The two above stood like stone, so astounded were they, and for several moments they gazed at the apparently lifeless form of the desperate youth, and measured the distance with their

eyes and shook their plumed heads. It was a terrible leap, but the bushes saved Allen from the enemy's grasp.

He was only stunned, and scratched on the face and hands pretty severely ; and while the two Indians were attending to their dying companion, he crept up under a thick bush, taking his rifle in his feeble grasp, where he rested his weary limbs, watching for the reappearance of the heads above.

'Twas not long ere he heard their fiendish cries ringing through the deathly stillness of the wood, telling him that the victim of his knife was dead, and that they were ready for revenge. Rising upon his elbow he looked up through the vegetation and gloom, and discovered the two heads again.

The savages were surprised. Their enemy was gone ; instead of a lifeless body, he was able to get away. They leaned far over and peered down into the many hiding-places the luxuriant vines and bushes afforded, as if hoping to discover the white man dragging his torn and maimed limbs after him as he endeavored to climb the ascent. They could not believe that a human being's leap down here would result in any thing but broken limbs and fatal wounds.

But they were soon made to see that Allen was not quite dead. They were still hanging around the edge of the ravine, vainly endeavoring to get a glimpse of the supposed dying youth, when, anxious to get out of the place, Allen aimed his rifle upward at one of the peering faces and fired.

Shot through the brain, the savage uttered a low cry of pain, and fell forward, down through the bushes and vines, now measuring the distance with his body instead of his eyes.

Down, down his lifeless body whirled, bounding and rebounding on the limbs of the small trees, giving Allen a fair picture of the leap he had previously taken, at last rolling in the bright little stream, where his life-blood mingled on the water with that of his enemy.

"I can hardly realize it," reflected Allen, looking at the still, dusky form. "I have murdered two human beings within the last half-hour ! I am not the same person I was yesterday ! Then I would have recoiled at the idea ; now my blood boils, and it seems as if I could kill every blood-thirsty red-skin in reach of my bullets !"

As he ended his soliloquy a dull sound fell upon his ear, much resembling the noise of some heavy body moving over the dry twigs in the forest above.

He looked up; and as he did so, a large, dark body appeared on the brink of the ravine, then rolled off and came crashing down directly toward him.

"God!" he cried, making an effort to leave his position, and raising his hands upward as if striving to ward off the crushing weapon descending upon his head. "I'll be crushed to jelly by that huge log! God help me now!"

The remaining Indian, seeing his brothers slain, determined upon avenging them. Observing where the shot, that killed the savage on the edge of the gully, came from, by the cloud of smoke, he hit upon a plan by which he supposed he could crush his enemy to death.

Near the ravine lay a portion of a fallen tree, somewhat decayed, but still hard enough to answer his purpose.

While the Indian had been busily engaged in rolling this log to the spot, from whence it was to make its descent, Allen had very wisely engaged himself in reloading his rifle, at the same time indulging in a bit of soliloquy.

The huge black log descended with gathering rapidity, tearing the bushes and vines from its path and scattering the leaves like a whirlwind, bounding and turning at every leap, but not swerving an inch from its course!

Death from it was unavoidable, unless it should strike some stout branch, and either be checked or turned from its path. Allen endeavored to leave his position under the bush, as we have recorded, with a faint hope of eluding the missile, as it were.

But he had taken no measures, not having time, when the log came crashing like a mighty avalanche against a small tree above him, and for a second nothing could be heard but the cracking of the trunk. Then, as he cuddled to the earth, expecting to be crushed to death, the next instant he was pressed violently to the very edge of the little stream by the top of the falling tree, while the log itself shot over his head, and fell with a dull sound not ten feet away!

Stunned and bleeding, Allen drew himself from the interlaced branches and vines, and securing his gun, crept up under

the protection of a shelving rock. He gave up all hope of assisting Edna now. He would lie here and die, with no one to see him, no one to hear his groans, he said.

It was folly for him to think of ever getting away now ; he was too weak, and if no friendly eye fell upon him, starvation would be his fate. His thoughts ran thus, but he was yet stronger than his confusion would allow him to realize.

He had, by the hand of Providence, twice narrowly escaped death—that terrible leap, and then the rushing log ! He was only confused and terror-stricken, and soon he felt his strength returning to his limbs ; but he did not venture out. 'Twas possible and probable that the real-man above was on the watch, and had another huge weapon in readiness.

So Allen remained in his hiding-place until noon. The sun by this time was shining brilliantly, here and there throwing golden patches along the shaded ravine and flecking the rich vegetation with mellow light. The stillness was so intense that Allen grew restless and panted to leave the place ; but he was woodman enough to know that the savage was watching for him. The dusky warrior had seen that his plan was fruitless, that the young man had escaped the death prepared for him, and he accordingly seated himself above, like a cat waiting for the appearance of her prey, and watched with loaded rifle.

"I suppose I must wait until the night comes on," he said. "There is no other alternative. To go out now and attempt to ascend the side of the ravine would be certain death. But I can not stay here—I must not allow the afternoon to slip away in idleness. Edna, my poor Edna, you need protection ; I will extend it to you, perish or not perish !" And he glanced sadly at his torn garments and bleeding limbs ; then seeing that his rifle was in order he cautiously emerged from under the shelving rock and looked upward.

There was nothing human visible—nothing but the sunshine streaming down through the trees, and the torn vegetation where the log had descended, and the somberness that reigned supreme. There were only the sounds of the wood-birds and the gentle rustling of the trees in the breeze that fell upon his ear.

But the absence of human beings did not embolden Allen his late terrible experience had brought on caution. He dared not venture in too exposed a position before knowing the enemy's whereabouts and movements.

For a few moments he looked up along the edge of the ravine, and searched the descent carefully, then gazed alternately up and down the little stream. Still he would not leave his position, scoffing at the idea of the savage having departed. He was watching the spot above, where he had been forced to leap for life, feeling almost confident that the Indian was there, when a bunch of feathers appeared, then a face, then half a dusky body.

The red-skin was yet in the vicinity. He was lying on his breast, looking far over the verge of the ravine.

Allen sprung to a bush, hoping to elude the glittering eyes above; but it was too late. Hardly had he gained cover when a rifle cracked and a bullet cut through the bush, barely grazing his person.

"Now, I suppose, it is my turn," said the youth; and when the dark head was visible again he rested his rifle; and after indulging in quite a long aim he fired.

There was nothing to tell of the result. After the smoke had cleared, he searched in vain for the Indian, above. The head was gone; there had been no cry; no fall; nothing to encourage him in his determination of making his exodus from the gully ere darkness came on.

He knew not the best plan. If he had killed the savage there was no danger in climbing out of the ravine; but if the enemy still lived there was danger in even leaving his cover. To stay until night, in ignorance as to the true state of affairs, would be uncomfortable, not to say unmanly.

His nature was maddened when he thought of Edna and his mother and of their peril, and suddenly deciding, he left the bush; and, with more vigor and speed than his bruised limbs warranted, he commenced the ascent.

Now hand over hand, up some trailing vine, then step by step advancing through the bushes, again making way faster with hands than feet, ever watching for the face of his opponent, Allen neared the earth above.

He feared that ere he reached the summit the savage

would appear and make an easy victim of him. Yet, on and up he clambered, with a sweet face before him and a pleasant, motherly one at his side. As he neared the spot where the red-man had lain, he ascended more slowly and with less noise, and kept his form screened as much as possible.

'Twas with the expectation of having his head blown to the winds for his pains when he peered over the summit.

With a loud cry of exultation he leaped to the ground above, the result of his last shot so surprising him that he lost all caution again. The savage lay stretched out upon the sward, with a face, alone, that told of instant death. When struck by Allen's bullet his form had rolled back a few inches from the verge of the ravine, thus preventing the youth from learning the result.

Mingled feelings of exultation, and of horror at the blood he had shed in one day, filled his heart as he turned away from the scene of his marvelous escape, and made all haste toward the home of his mother.

He halted not until the hut stood before him; and he left this place with a fear of some awful deed having been done while he was absent. There was no one here; the door was open, and the general appearance of things told him that she who was an inmate the night before, and whom he so dearly loved, had taken her departure; whether of her own free will toward the settlement, or against her will into captivity, he could not say. There were no blood-stains to be seen; there had been no sickening deed committed *here*, certain.

There were tracks around the cabin, but as to their being old or new, from whites or reds, he had not the least conception. He could stand and form many ideas as to his mother's fate, but, not hunter-like, he could not substantiate a single idea with so much as a footprint, nor with any thing else of equal import. It was not till late in the afternoon that he turned his back upon the cabin, and hurried away toward the settlement.

He had a very faint hope that his mother had gone to the protection of the settlers, thinking she had seen "signs." He was positive that she did not go unless her position had become

dangerous, or she had been warned by some roving pioneer. With a determination of learning this, and of returning to the river ere the attack upon Wheeler's cabin could be made, he steadily walked on.

But we will not follow him. Let it suffice to say that a load was removed from his heart on reaching the settlement. His mother was there. The reader, undoubtedly, remembers that when Eustace left his mother, after having obtained the huge knife, the latter person fell upon the floor, sick and faint.

It may be within the bounds of propriety to relate that she immediately left the cabin, and went to the settlement, where her dear son found her.

The sun was setting in splendor that only the gifted can picture, when Allen set out, much refreshed, for the river, where he expected any thing but a pleasant time, in war with Eustace and the red-men.

CHAPTER VII.

EDNA'S SHADOWY FORM.

IN consequence of heavier rains further up the river, the Ohio was swelled to an unnatural size. The muddy water lashed the shores with fury, and the waves ran high, while the broad expanse was dotted with floating logs and drift-wood. The willows, wherein Allen and the hunter had hidden their forms from Eustace and the savages, were almost entirely submerged in the yellow liquid; and the spot on which the first two had eaten their morning meal, was washed time and again by the lapping waters. All day Ham had watched the steady rising of the stream, the growing of the ripples into rushing ridges, the tranquillity gradually changing into running undulations; as he had drawn the canoe far up the bank, he gazed with interest upon the disappearing vegetation.

He had rested at the tree until the water compelled him to make a hasty retreat, and had turned his face many times toward the settlement. He could not gainsay that he was sorry that he had suffered Allen to depart alone; and had the youth

appeared during the day he would have almost cried for joy. The staying behind while his companion attempted the "second-named duty," was only one of the hunter's eccentricities, and not the offspring of laziness or cowardice.

And Ham waited patiently, saw the sun come from the dull clouds, and reclined upon the grass in its heat until the far-off horizon swallowed it up. He said he would not leave the spot before Allen appeared—nothing could induce him into such faithlessness—"he wouldn't stir till the boy came up, if the boy staid ten thousan' year."

But when the twilight had given way to night, and the stars had shone upon the maddened river for some time, he grew restless, and came near losing those qualities which characterize the hunter, trapper and Indian-fighter.

He imagined he heard firing, and whoops, and sometimes cries of pain, on the opposite shore, and fairly panted to drive the canoe over the swift-running waters, and participate in the struggle he feared was existing between Eustace and the red-men, and his friend Albert Wheeler. So eager was he, that every few moments he pushed the light craft into the stream and stepped partly in; but invariably he ended these actions in returning to his position and again assuming his posture of waiting.

"Thar!" he said, rising hurriedly to his feet and looking toward the opposite, distant bank. "I've heerd that kind o' noise enough to be fur from a mistake. Them's Injun guns, and that's old Wheeler's shootin'-concern that just sounded. Lis'en! Them's Injun yells, now. Snakes! wouldn't old Ham play the mischief among you if he's over thar, ye red imps?"

Leaning upon his long rifle he continued watching the other side of the river, where the forest rose up like a black, imperious wall, listening and moving impatiently, and after giving utterance to remarks more reproachful than otherwise to the absent young man. He paced up and down the grass after a little and looked savagely at the earth, and shook his head. This failing to satisfy him he shouldered his gun and strode toward the settlement, as if determined to bring the tardy youth instead of awaiting his appearance.

Being a man who had in his time been used to coming and going at his will, it worked upon him like fetters to be placed

under such an obligation as this. He had asserted that Allen should have his aid in the rescue of Edna from Eustace, and he felt that if he should leave the river he would necessarily break his word, and lose his honor.

He did not go far in his course. His ear caught sounds of triumph, and he thought he heard a shrill voice of agony from the lips of one whom he cherished as a dear friend.

Without waiting to hear more he ran to the canoe, bestowing no thoughts now upon the friend he was to leave behind with no means of crossing the broad and rapid river.

The paddle was soon working vigorously in the strong hand of the hunter, and the boat shot out into the rushing water. So strong was the current of the Ohio and so numerous were the floating trees, that it required much labor on Ham's part to prevent the craft from being swamped. The canoe seemed more desirous of shooting down-stream sidewise, than of stemming the river in a manner becoming to water-craft; or the waves appeared determined to engulf the bold adventurer, ere he reached the land to which he was, with difficulty, steering.

At last the black forest frowned upon him, and the leaves of the drooping trees swept across his sweating face. With one final mighty stroke the hunter drove his craft upon the land, and sprung out, and cast a hasty glance over at the Kentucky shore. He was a little surprised; the swiftness of the stream had carried him down more than a mile from the place of embarkation.

He would be compelled to walk quite a distance through the tangled wood before reaching the home of Wheeler. If there had been an onset, a victory to the savages, he would arrive too late. But he secured the serviceable boat, and, with a touch of sorrow for the one he had deserted, struck into the woods.

"Dang it all!" he exclaimed, simultaneously with a smart slap in the face from a tangly vine. "All from this hyur sud-dint heave of the river. Ef I could only 'a' landed in the woods frontin' Wheeler's house I'd been in time fur a fight. But as it are I've *got* to do somethin'. I am bound to cut my way through this 'ere infernal viney, bushy woods."

He had remained in a standing position while talking as above, and as he started forward again.

But Ham took not a dozen steps ere he halted again.

Two forms, faintly visible in the starlight, came from the wood, and after standing a moment upon a little grassy knoll overlooking the flooded river, disappeared in the darkness.

They made no sounds ; they moved away like spirits. They were not Indians ; there were no Indian head-ornaments.

One, Ham observed, during the brief time they stood exposed to his view, wore a broad, low-drooping hat, and the form was bent and looked as if the man was screening himself from a storm. He betrayed himself in one little movement : as he stood upon the grass, facing the river, holding a person in his right arm, he grasped the rim of his hat with his left hand, and drew it far down upon his face ! And as he silently went away, seeming to drag the other after him, the eyes of the hunter saw a quantity of long dark hair falling upon his shoulders !

Unfortunately he failed to see the other form plainly enough to recognize it. He saw the flutter of something like a dress, but that was all pertaining to the unknown figure.

One of the twain was, with not a shadow of a doubt, Eustace Everard ; the hat, the cat-like movements, the little action to cover the face, were proofs as to that. But his companion—who was that ? He appeared to be carrying the figure, and his arm was clasped tightly. Ah ! a captive ! His reward for the attack upon Wheeler's cabin, was this burden !

Then Ham's mind began to change with the dawn of the truth. "Old Wheeler's" cabin had been fallen upon, the savages, perhaps, having been too impatient to await midnight. There had been a victory to the attackers—a complete victory, for the leader of the onset had just passed by, bearing in his arms the beautiful form of Edna Wheeler. But where were the Indians, to whom the man with drooping hat and fair face was, apparently, so attached ? The only reply to this query running in the hunter's mind was that the reds had become interested in some ceremony or torture, and while so, Eustace had quietly slipped away, carrying Edna with him. This was the most salient reason for the non-appearance of the Indian party, forced upon the attention of the experienced woodman, and the most truthful one, perchance.

Having studied in the deep shadow of the trees for a few

seconds, Ham stepped boldly forward and stood upon the knoll where the phantom-like twain had rested, and leaning upon his gun he began his immortal soliloquizing; this time hoarsely:

"Poor Allen Evergreen,—" not being proficient in the art of pronunciation—"your gal is gone. Your brother Oustess—" again failing in the pronounciative line—"has got her, arter all of our fussin'. I pity ye when you find it out, an' I won't pity him when you lay claws on his ha'r, 'cause you'll tear him to pieces fine enuff fur to feed gallinippers on, an' I do like to watch gallinippers turn up thur noses at sich gläce, brother! Which do you think 'ud do best, Evergreen?" answered continued, addressing a stump near by, as if it would do the best, "I say now, which do you expose galli—the gal, or to run foller yer brother and reskew the concern from top to bottom, eh? the cabin and l'arn the hull and nab you and bring you over here, hey?"

His voice was loud, and during talking he stretched his hand toward the stump, as an orator his arms decayed listener would return an answer of wisdom.

"That's right—think a while afore you tell me now, Evermore, so as to be right in your answer. Didn't understand the natur' o' the queery, eh? Well, I said, must th' hoss foller the feller an' the purty Wheeler, or run up to the cabin an' l'arn the hull story from root to top, or go over the rapid water an' let you come hyar? Now!"

He ended in the most emphatic manner, slowly speaking, and looking upon the stump with admiration.

"Well, if you're dumb, I can't help it; so I'll jest set down on yer top-knot an' rest a bit, an' then trail up that infernal renegade." And so ending he moved toward the black, rotten stump; but he had not reached it ere a dusky body sprung up from its covert and sped away like a shadow, soon being concealed in the vegetation.

"I'll bet my moccasins 'ut that was Oustess Everywhar!" exclaimed Ham, astounded at the idea of his having addressed a body of flesh rather than one of wood. "Then I'll bet my leggins 'ut he and her hev been hid there ever

since they fust came in sight. Next, I'll bet my head 'ut he had her with him as he lit from here; and that, ear another sun comes up, I'll have Edna and her stealer."

Ham arranged all things necessary to the search, and slowly walked in the direction the dark form had taken.

The river had fallen a little, and a new moon was hanging in the western sky, when the hunter disappeared in the forest, and began the search.

'Twas now his intention to rescue Edna from Eustace, if possible, and to leave Allen to care for himself. He did not doubt but that before morning he could return with the beautiful girl in his possession; and he felt that if circumstances should necessitate the death of Eustace, *he won* rather do the deed than see a brother execute it. *in quest*

So Ham's keen eyes swept through the dark the hours fled of the renegade brother and the *whereabouts*. He and he found neither, nor *any*:

sat down on the earth to have some sleep. No use in a man
 "Wal, I *am* *going* to *me*. In the mornin' I'll start ag'in, and
 bein' awake all *the*, or you may chaw my ears off? So, good-
 night, and he stretched himself on the grass, and soon
 ind *ed* in slumber that was troubled by loud, equine snor-
 ing."

CHAPTER XII.

EDNA'S FATHER.

"DISLOYAL!"

Allen Everard threw himself upon the grass, uttering the above significant word, his manner the embodiment of despair, as he looked out upon the waste of muddy water.

The stars were shining now, and he imagined they looked so coldly down upon him and his sorrow. Indeed, it was a sorrow, to be thus deprived of the opportunity of assisting the beautiful object of his passionate love.

"Yes, disloyal," he repeated, more emphatically than before,

'disloyal to me, whom he promised to befriend. He has gone over the river, taking the canoe, and leaving me with no means by which I can follow him. Edna—*dear* Edna, God be with you this night!" He arose to his feet and gazed wildly about him. He thought of crossing the flooded Ohio with a log, clinging to it while swimming; but the rushing, maddened stream, filled with floating dangers, precluded the possibility of such an attempt.

There was no alternative but to watch and wait. When the river should become more tranquil he would undertake to reach the opposite bank, and not before. To make such an effort while the water remained so turgid would be nothing more than to plunge into a watery grave.

Allen could only think of Ham, the brave hunter, in the light of an unprincipled man—one who cared nothing for his honor, nor for the good will of his friend.

Having exhausted himself, both in planning and moving about the river's edge in restlessness, he concluded to find a suitable place for a night's repose. When he turned upon his heel to go under the canopy of a large, wide-spreading tree, it was about the time Ham landed on the opposite shore, a mile below. As he was in the act of changing his position, a bright light came to his view, far over the water. It proved to be in the forest directly opposite—the black forest that sheltered the home of Edna.

It was not a blaze he looked upon—it was the *glare* of a blaze lighting up the sky and wood, like that of a rising full moon, paling the light of the stars in its radiance.

He watched it, with heart beating loudly and face pale, knowing what it was, knowing what had happened. He stared at it as it grew like a sheet of fire upon the northern sky, and as sparks, like tiny stars, went flying up, up into the night-air.

He, as Ham had before, imagined he heard cries of distress and savage yells of victory. He, too, chafed as a caged animal, longing to take a part in the "fight."

'Twas all over now. The two inmates of the cabin had been captured, and the latter was now being destroyed by the fierce flames. 'Twas too late now to assist her, he thought, she being in Eustace's hands and gone he knew not whither!

Yet he would exert himself to avenge her, should she be lost from him. The tie of consanguinity should not face him as a barrier now, and prevent him from avenging himself and the dear one whom he feared was forever lost !

Sedulously he would search for Eustace, day after day, night following night, until they, brothers as they were, should stand face to face, each prepared for mortal combat.

"And," he said, through his closed teeth, watching the waning light of the burning cabin, "should I find her the same pure maiden, she shall be mine ; but should I discover her otherwise, then will I spend the remainder of my days in sadness, caring not for life. Oh, God, spare her ; spare her !"

Then covering his agonized face with his hands he slowly walked away, and soon reclined beneath the tree previously mentioned. Here he lay, looking at the earth, now and then giving the dying fire a cursory glance.

He soon saw the impossibility of his winning sleep—the harder he tried to become oblivious to the sullen roar of the river, the louder the roar seemed to grow. The present state of his affairs, and the view he had of the future, preyed upon his mind and eliminated that which was his meed after his day of adventures and escapes.

Turning over, wiping the sweat from his face, throwing his hands wildly over his grassy couch, and moving restlessly in many ways, Allen might have seduced a looker-on into the belief that he was raving with a fierce fever.

Morning came, but no sleep had closed the eyes of the youthful hunter and sufferer. With the light of dawn he arose, more wearied than refreshed by his position, and went to the river. It had fallen almost to its natural completeness, and its surface was now void of driftwood.

He saw to the priming of his gun, and seated himself upon a mossy stone, awaiting the appearance of game, of which he could make his breakfast. The sun's morning brilliancy was streaming on the water, and lighting up the trees, when Allen descried, up-stream a short distance, a bevy of ducks.

Somewhat pleased at the sight of these delicious birds, he struck off in a run toward them. Just as he arrived in good shooting distance they arose, and flew further up the river, dipping down under a clump of overhanging bushes.

Exclaiming spleenishly, he directed his steps after them once more. But, as a sportsman's luck will have it, the birds again sped away ere a shot could be made.

Allen watched them until they disappeared at a bend in the river; then, concluding that he would try the efficacy of fishing, he started back in the course he had taken.

"I can give no reason, but ducks, and game of all kinds, are very scarce this morning. I shall try to get some fish, and then—why, then, I'll build a raft and cross the river," he said, increasing his gait, and glancing about him in order to see if sufficient timber lay near to construct a raft.

As he looked, during his walk, he saw enough to warrant that a craft of that kind could be made, and also observed something that plainly showed the approach of a human being. Over on the opposite shore were several dark forms, the brownness of their skin proving them to be red-men. They were running hither and thither, gesticulating the while, and looking out on the water. Some were armed with guns, but the greater part of the number could boast of few or no weapons.

At first the young man did not discern the object of these singular actions upon the part of the reds; but soon his earnest gaze fell upon the canoe, skimming o'er the water like a swallow, propelled by the almost frantic strokes of a white man sitting in the stern. The occupant of the boat paddled on, looking behind him at intervals, apparently to learn if he was followed. He had headed straight toward the spot where Allen stood; but the current carried him gradually down-stream, making it manifest that, should he effect a landing, it would be much below the young man. One of the Indians seemed suddenly to remember his gun, and raising the weapon to his shoulder he quickly fired at the fleeing pale-face.

The result could not have been as he wished, for the object of his aim continued plying the oar with usual energy; and ere another shot could be sent after him he was beyond harm of their bullets. However, they did fire, the effect only going to increase their rage.

"Mr. Wheeler, is that you?" cried Allen, running down the bank, as the pursued white neared the shore.

"Yes, Allen Everard, this is Wheeler," was the answer from the one addressed, as he saw the fine form of the youth.

"And," he added, dropping his paddle, and rising to his feet in the canoe, "you execrable villain, let me warn you now, and see that you heed my warning! I am—"

Allen threw up his hand deprecatingly, interrupting the vehement speech with words that amounted to simply nothing in the present temper of Mr. Wheeler.

"I am fully convinced," continued the one in the boat, "Mr. Everard, that your family is one of hereditary villainy; and am positive that ere the summer is over, you, your mother and your brother will be where all wicked characters go!"

He spoke with such wildness that Allen readily observed that he had sustained some terrible blow from Eustace.

"Mr. Wheeler, calm yourself, do calm yourself; for as sure as heaven shines above us you are misinformed in regard to this difficulty. Oh, Mr. Wheeler—"

But Mr. Wheeler was some distance away, his canoe having drifted down the stream, thus preventing him from hearing the youth's earnest appeal for justice.

Allen ran after him, endeavoring to bring him ashore, where they could come to an understanding; but the father of the fair Edna declined speaking further with the "originator of his sorrow," and paddled slowly along the bank, warning the youth to stay from his reach if he wished to live.

"I would rather die than have you, sir, think thus of me," cried Allen, following the boat in its steady progress. "Come to shore and I will show how much in the wrong you are, and make it more than evident to you that I am not implicated in any thing that has been done to mar your happiness **and** that of—of Edna!"

Mr. Wheeler and the canoe still moved on despite Everard's entreaties, and as the father of Edna stands erect in the craft, we may with propriety examine him more closely. He is of medium size, apparently fifty years of age, with features and facial expression that indicate a quick temper, and remarkable bravery when under excitement. He is dressed in garments mostly of his own manufacture; and though there is no rifle near him to complete his picture as a hunter, there is that in his exterior, assisted by a knife in his belt, that proclaims him to be such.

Mr. Wheeler is a fine-looking man. He was born in one of

the Carolinas, married there, and made his exodus from that country when he knew Indian warfare was at its height on the banks of the Ohio. When he started upon his emigration, Edna, his only child, was ten years old; and as she now can claim the seeing of seventeen summers we can readily learn that her life upon the Ohio river has been one of seven years. The mother of Edna died shortly subsequent to the arrival of the family in the wilds of Kentucky.

The father and child were not free in all these years from the deeds of the red foe; they had often narrowly escaped death from the hurled tomahawk or the whizzing arrow; yet captivity, into which maidens of that day were dragged, regardless of beauty, had never thrust in a ruthless hand and separated them—until now, let us add.

"Allen Everard," responded Wheeler, dipping his paddle in order to check the canoe in its drifting, and with his dark eyes flashing with anger, "if I had the least idea that you could change my opinion of you I would surely go ashore; but as it stands between us, as last night's proceedings indicate, I must turn a deaf ear to your hypocritical words, and leave you to further developments."

"You speak of last night—what was the result?" cried Allen, still following the boat in its slow movements.

"Anxious to know? Eustace didn't give you the full particulars, eh?" was the sarcastic response.

"Dear sir, you do me—" Here Allen's speech was cut short by a sudden exclamation from Wheeler, and swift motions of the paddle, the canoe and its master soon passing from sight. It was not difficult for the youth to conjecture the cause of this action upon the part of the white. His speculations proved correct when a boat, containing five savage Shawnees, appeared, evidently in pursuit.

Concealing his form in the vegetation, Allen watched them, with the hope that Wheeler might escape their weapons. The scarcity of arms among the approaching enemies led the young man to conclude that the party which had driven the parent of his loved one from the other shore, had discovered a canoe and was now renewing the chase.

Swiftly they paddled before the concealed one's eyes, and ere long had disappeared around the neighboring bend.

Allen slowly and cautiously advanced down-stream, in order to see the chase that he supposed was in progress; but when he arrived upon the summit of a hill, and had a view of the rolling Ohio for miles, he was astonished to see nothing pursued or pursuers. They could not have gone straight down the river and escaped his notice in so short a time; that was an impossibility, for he could see a very great distance on the water. The most reasonable supposition on this point was, they were at the foot of the hill on which he was standing and were concealed by the intervening bushes.

Perhaps, he suddenly thought, Mr. Wheeler was now a victim of the tomahawk or knife; but the personage alluded to in connection with murder, at this juncture emerged from the vegetation below, and, with his only weapon grasped in his hand, sprung up the side of the hill with celerity.

On the appearance of Wheeler, loud yells came from the bushes, and simultaneously the five Indians came to view, their faces proclaiming their determination to destroy the pursued pale-face. The suddenness of this event precluded preparation for concealment, and before Allen could spring behind cover near at hand, the Indians saw him and pressed on faster than ever, apparently with the expectation of "killing two birds with one stone."

The yelling, terrible-looking quintette pursued Wheeler with such speed that it was plain to see that ere the summit of the slope was reached the latter would be overtaken. In fact, they were gaining on him so rapidly that ere another moment could pass, their tomahawks could be driven into his brain with ease. The old man could offer but feeble resistance to the fierce attack he would receive; the only weapon in his possession was a knife of ordinary kind.

Allen had not moved from his standing position.

The opportunity to assist the father of Edna—the man who, through misunderstanding, hated him—held him to the spot, with rifle in readiness and knife loosened in his belt. Here was a chance to show Mr. Wheeler that he held no malice toward him, and that if Eustace was a friend to the Indians and a foe to the whites, *he* was not.

Mr. Wheeler, seeming to know that one of the savages was immediately behind him, quickly turned to the right;

and darting before the band, turned again and fled down the slope, completely eluding and surprising the foe for the time being. The old pioneer bounded away, as if he were not already much exhausted, and disappeared in the bushes. Then, as the enemy stood looking after him, his canoe left the shore, towing their boat in the rear, which, as a natural consequence, increased their rage ten-fold.

"Ha! ha! Allen Everard, your allies didn't get me after all! When you hear of me again you will feel the touch of my bullet!" cried Wheeler, as he neared the other shore, shaking his fist at the youth's form on the hill.

CHAPTER IX

A RUSE AND A SHOT.

HAM, the hunter, continued his snoring, as he lay asleep in the forest on the northern bank of the Ohio, until the light of morning falling upon him caused the end of his "nap."

Arising and going to a small creek that flowed into the great river, he performed his morning ablution; subsequent to which he succeeded in bringing down a flying waterfowl.

These duties presented another; that of building a fire.

"Young Evergreen's afeard o' fires bringin' on Injuns," he said, gathering sticks and leaves into a heap; "but I ain't; not by a good 'eal. If thar's reds abind every tree in this woods I'd show smoke jist to prove that I's no sneakin' coward, not sayin' 'ut Evergrin is cowardly a tall."

The smoke now arose from the little pile before him, and curled and floated away as if in haste to inform the ever-watchful Indian of the hunter's whereabouts.

"I'll now perceed to cook this goose, though it ain't jist the kind o' meat I hanker arter; then arter eatin' of it I'll find that gal-stealer's trail and follow him up till I lay my hands upon the bootiful beauty," he said.

For some time the stillness of morning was only broken

by the crackling blaze and the sputtering fowl. Ham, still the smiling man, sat propped up against a tree, watching the roasting bird that hung upon the stick held by his hand. As intimated, he was smiling, and the merry eyes were full of fun ; what his thoughts were dwelling upon it would have been hard to tell.

His eyes twinkled more and more and he smiled broader and broader, while the now unnoticed fowl, turned very dark, made it plain that the hunter was watching something in the woods. At last he arose and placed his savory breakfast upon a piece of bark, still gazing through the forest.

He was looking toward a spot in the wood where the undergrowth was scarce ; and the trees, quite free from lower limbs, were interlocked and arched in a canopy for the bright green carpet below, as in some old Gothic church, where, arch springing from arch, nave and choir and wings seem struggling to uphold the common roof. This place, beautified still more by the golden sunshine of morning flecking it, as it penetrated the foliage above, drew Ham's full attention, it seemed. Yet it is hardly probable that he would leave his untasted meal in order to view a scene so common in primeval forests. There certainly is something occurring to mar the comfort of his morning meal.

Shading his eyes with his broad hand, so as to give him a better view, Ham's face quickly lost its broad smile and donned an expression of mingled surprise and seriousness.

"What a fool I've been, to be sure," he growled ; and the next moment he had completely quenched the little fire, and leaped behind the adjacent tree, in performance of which action he also devoured the roasted bird.

"There I set," he added, as he watched some object, on the spot mentioned, from his covert, "lookin' thar where thar ain't no bushes, thinkin' as how I saw Allen Evergreen standin' 'ith his back toward me. Thinks I he's huntin' me, for every little bit he'd look at the grass as if s'archin' fur my trail ; and I staid hyar an' laughed, an' the smoke o' my fire blowed right to him."

The above words make it evident that his eyes are upon an enemy, rather than Allen Everard.

"But 'twasn't Allen. 'Cause if 'twas I'd not be standin'

ahind this tree, and I wouldn't 'a' eat my goose so thundering quick ; nor would Ham 'a' put out his fire so sudden like. No ; it's worse 'an Allen. It's a fellow I ain't afeard of ; yet I dasen't allow him to see me."

Ham remained silent now, his eyes peering from his concealment, while his rifle rested in his hands prepared for what the precursors seemed to tell was coming.

Let us peep over his shoulder and discover what, or who, it is that causes him to be so wary.

First, we see the brown trunks of the many trees before us, the same as those on every other side, and look over the tops of bushes and underbrush where little patches of sunlight flit about like golden wood-elves ; and as our eyes grow accustomed to the pervading shadowiness, we observe birds of divers colors, skipping and flying hither and thither, and frequently catch the flash of a squirrel's glossy coat in the sun's rays. Were we to look far through the forest, to watch the glistening of the Ohio, resembling a silvery serpent gliding amid the trees, we would fail to notice the object which Ham still gazes upon.

Turn your eyes upon the lovely spot not a hundred yards away. Do you see, leaning against a large sycamore tree, with his face turned from you, a man's form ?

Does it require study to recognize him, even though his face is unseen ? The long, glossy black hair, falling upon the broad shoulders, the wild dress, somewhat contrasted by the low-drooping hat, the general appearance that fills you with hatred for the man, all seem to be hissing with the voice of a demon, "The result of my never-failing fortune—I am now contented !"

This form was mistaken by Ham for Allen ; and the hunter supposed he was to have some sport in watching "Evergreen hunt for the trail ;" but a single glance upon the dark hair turned the tide of affairs, as we have seen.

Eustace Everard, whom the Indian-fighter had seen with Edna Wheeler as a captive the night before, leaned calmly against the trunk of the tree, with his arms folded on his breast. He appeared to be waiting as well as watching for some one. From the carelessness he displayed with his weapons it was reasonable for Ham to conclude that the renegade was awaiting

the appearance of a friend rather than the approach of an enemy. His rifle rested some few feet off upon a rising piece of ground, and the huge knife served to keep it company.

Ham, remembering the two forms he had seen the night previous, began to inquire into the resting-place of Edna by closely scrutinizing every bush in sight. Failing to see her or any clue to her whereabouts, he resumed his gazing upon Eustace's form, muttering the following words :

"Oustess Evergrade, in less 'an two flaps of a duck's wing I'll be upon you fur a fought. No, I won't nuther ! I'll jest walk peace'bly upon you, an' we'll have a little talk, durin' which I kin spy around fur Miss Whaler."

So saying he shouldered his gun and started boldly toward Eustace, apparently unconscious of the latter's presence ; being very busily engaged in looking up at the green leaves.

He advanced awkwardly, as if unused to the woods, and in his stepping managed to break the stillness with cracking twigs and rustling dry leaves.

This unusual noise aroused the renegade from what seemed to be a deep study. He faced quickly about ; and as he observed the novice-looking hunter approaching, turned his back as if deciding to flee. If he had any fears as to the unfriendliness of the stranger, the words from Ham dispelled them in a twinkling.

"Say, mister, s'pose ye don't know whar Albert Wheeler lives duz ye ?" cried the hunter, coming up to Eustace and shaking him by the hand, at the same time putting on a look of fatigue as if he had "tramped it" a great distance.

"Mr. Wheeler ?" said the younger, thoughtfully, endeavoring to cover with his broad hat the pallor he knew had fallen over his face, and moving uneasily. "Mr. *Wheeler* ?" he repeated, as if striving to recall some remembrance.

After a somewhat lengthy silence, in the time of which Everard watched the ground, and Ham surveyed with lightning-like glances the scene, the former spoke :

"Oh, yes : Mr. Wheeler—Albert Wheeler. Well, sir, his cabin did stand in this wood, perhaps a mile up the river, at the foot of a high and timbered hill."

"Yaas," drawled the hunter. "Did stand, eh ?"

"It did stand ; yes sir ; it did stand," replied Eustace ner

vously. "But now, if I am informed correctly, and I judge I am, his home lies in a heap of ashes."

"Heap o' ashes? Burnt, eh?" said Ham, expressing the most profound interest in the younger's recital.

"Yes, sir, burnt out. Last evening a band of savages attacked Wheeler's house; and, after murdering him and indulging in the worst kind of saturnalia, they carried off his daughter, a beautiful young girl."

"What?" exclaimed the elder. "You don't say as how Aidna Wheeler's been tuk, duz yer? And them sabages you's speakin' on, air they any of 'em around?"

Ham made such a ludicrous picture here, in showing his terror at the thought of Indians, that Eustace laughed aloud, and concluded that the stranger could easily be thrust aside in case of necessity. In fact, the old woodman's ruse worked splendidly and disarmed its victim of his wariness. Ham continued:

"They tole me, the folks did, when I left hum, 'ut I'd prob'ly run ag'in' an Injun or two. Is they any around hyur, mister? I ain't full partic'lar 'bout havin' my hair tuk! They *do say* the unfeelin' reds 'll skulp a fellow in less 'an no time. Is't so, stranger?"

"Even so, and tenfold more horrible. What your *folks* have told you is nothing compared with the truth. I have seen Indians hold infants by the heels and dash out their brains against a tree. I have seen men burn in a fire that wrapped their naked bodies as in a scarlet shroud. This wood contains no less than two hundred Indians—"

"Oh!" cried the listener, beginning to tremble.

"All armed," continued Eustace, smiling, "and all on the war-path. Now, it is nothing more than my never-failing fortune that always saves me. I have never received a wound—"

"Hain't you?" interrupted Ham, in feigned innocence.

"No; never a wound."

"Never see'd any Injuns, prob'ly!"

"Hundreds of them, every day," apparently growing angry

"Run from 'em, mebbe!"

"Sir!" Eustace stepped forward and picked up his knife.

"I'll just try this fellow's spunk," he thought.

"What you goin' to do 'ith that thing?" asked the hunter, retreating with his whiskered face full of pretended terror.

"You insulted me, sir, by asking if I ran from the enemy, and I now intend to castigate you for your insolence."

The renegade sprung swiftly at the old man as if intending to drive his long weapon into the broad breast.

Ham at first seemed disposed to "show fight," and while his eyes glistened with sudden anger, his fingers touched the handle of his knife. But he still retained his counterfeited cowardice; and as his enemy neared him, he cried, as if frightened almost to death:

"Oh, mister, don't! I'll tuk it all back! Now *don't!*" Then he moved backward and succeeded in his attempts to fall awkwardly over a log; and while he lay upon his back, yelling and entreating, Eustace laughed heartily, and declared he had never before seen such a big, strong man with so little courage. Being assured that the man really *was* a coward, and one of the worst kind, Eustace bade Ham arise and follow him. This order our friend readily obeyed, though not hastily nor gladly enough to arouse any thing like suspicion in the mind of the renegade.

"Whar you goin'?" drawled the personater, noisily tramping in the tracks of his leader.

"I am going to show you some one; and after that I am going to get you to help me in a little job," replied Eustace.

Old Ham's face was full of smiles, and he shook his fists at the villain's back as they walked on, now through undergrowth.

They did not go very far in their up-river course.

When they came to the foot of a high hill, covered with forest-trees and vines, Eustace asked his companion if he would keep what he would presently see, a secret. It is needless to say that the hunter promised to remain silent in regard to 'what he would presently see.'

Having exacted a promise from his "cowardly companion," the renegade told the former to remain behind a moment.

"Goin' to get Edna," muttered Ham, as the other disappeared. "I'll bet my moccasins on that."

And as he crouched in the underbush, he cocked his rifle, and resolved to shoot Everard the moment he appeared with the daughter of Albert Wheeler, even at the risk of hitting the fair maiden. He waited patiently for some time, but no one

came. He arose in the bushes and peered about him, and as he did so, a voice called out:

"So, Ham Harling, *you too*, are against me!" and the next instant the woods resounded the report of a gun, and Ham, uttering a low cry, fell back in the vegetation!

A form sprung from a tree and fled. It was not that of Eustace Everard. The man was Albert Wheeler!

CHAPTER X

A CAPTIVE.

SUDDENLY left to the mercy of the bloodthirsty Indians, Allen Everard hardly knew what to do. The five painted savages were so near, and the parting words of Mr. Wheeler had so unnerved him, that he did not dare hope for escape through flight. He almost knew that ere he could run a dozen steps the enemy would grasp him; and, what would he equivalent to the former, should he outstrip them at first they could surely capture him in the race, as he was much debilitated and felt that he would fall under much exercise.

Whether that debility should be attributed to the wound he had received from his brother on that night of revelations, or thrown upon the speech and manner of Wheeler, he was not prepared to say. Yet he felt that he was very weak, and he knew that his weakness would render his efforts to escape futile.

He had little time to reflect upon what might be his fate—but thoughts, horrible to hold, flashed upon him. He might be sacrificed at the stake, as many other whites had been, or his death might occur within the present hour. Infuriated by the loss of both prey and canoe, the Shawnees would, in all probability, slay him upon the spot.

When Wheeler had passed from view the red-men turned toward the young man, every eye flashing the rage that lay in each brown bosom.

"I will die as a man should!" exclaimed Allen, remem-

bering his loaded rifle. "Death stands before me; but I will not yield to his strong arm without first laying low one of the destroyers of my happiness!"

Standing out so boldly, with his white face expressing desperation, the enemies could not but admire him. They readily saw that hope had fled from him, and, untutored as they were, knew that man, when devoid of "that oasis in the arid desert of life," when exposed to danger, was a being to be dreaded. Despair usurps the warm place of hope, and none despair till they behold grim death staring them in the face, as it were. When the beautiful colors and shades of life become bleached with the bitterness of death, 'tis then man gives way to despondency, and cares not for consequences. Deeds almost incredible have been performed by persons placed in such positions as the one Allen Everard was exposed to—done by persons of the most timid nature.

The youth, in the desperation of the moment, raised his gun; and ere the group of savages could rush upon him or do any thing as a preventive of death to one of their number, the report struck upon their ears and the foremost fell. He fell into the others' arms, in the last tortures of his release from earth, wailing so touchingly that his slayer actually groaned aloud!

When he was dead his four comrades lowered him to the grass, during which, perhaps, our hero could have fled with some success. But he did not move. He leaned upon his rifle for support, looking upon the scene; and if there was any warm feeling in his heart, it was that of pity for the victim of his bullet. He knew what was now coming—a terrible struggle, in which he would surely die—but he still held to the resolve to perish as should a *man*.

The quartette of angry-looking faces finally turned from the dead Indian and flashed upon Allen.

One of them attempted to fire his rifle at their foe, but, as the weapon exploded, the aim was diverted by a blow from a comrade, who, undoubtedly, wished to secure Allen as a prisoner instead of a corpse. The gun thus struck aside saved the white's life; for the bullet passed closely to his cranium with a singing noise.

The Indian foiled turned upon the one who had interfered

with his shooting; and their words would have culminated in a blood-spilling set-to but for the timely interposition of the remaining two. In the time of these actions Allen saw that he could fly, and gain some advantage over them in a chase; but the weariness in his body prevented him from doing so; and he again awaited an onslaught, with the same feeling of hopelessness pervading his heart.

Having restored peace to their little band, the four savages stepped forward, with the fierceness on their ocherous faces somewhat relaxed; and when within a few yards of Allen they halted, abreast, the smaller of them speaking in English, though but indifferently, these words:

"Give up—no hurt—put down gun an' knife."

To this significant speech Allen replied:

"I could not die better than by struggling in defense—and I will *not* die at the stake, or by any of your infernal tortures! If you wish me to put down my weapons, come on!"

The small, wiry savage, who had spoken, uttered a cry that was the slogan of onset, he being the first to lay hands upon the brave youth.

Allen threw down his gun, and as the small, cat-like form sprung upon him, he grasped the throat with one hand, the breech-clout with the other; and, with all the strength he could command, he threw the Indian in the faces of the yelling trio! This act of valor upon the part of the youth, at once inspired the enemies with admiration and amazement.

While the defeated one was scrambling to his feet, Allen discovered that a dizziness was coming over him, and his lower limbs would not support him.

He sunk to the earth, exhausted; and when the savages bound his hands and feet, his faintness hardly allowed him to realize it. Allen was *carried* to the river's edge, his captors being so impressed with his bravery as to not force him to walk.

It was fortunate that they did not try to make him stand upon his feet, for he could not have done so.

The Indian whom he had shot was conveyed in a similar manner to the river, it being the intention of his comrades,

perhaps, to take the corpse to their village, or to some suitable place, for burial.

Everard, as he lay, strongly bound, in the long grass, now began to gather his usual strength ; and he closely watched the dusky forms. The quartette stood near, conversing in their own language and pointing on the river, sometimes upstream, and sometimes down, then again straight across from which the captive inferred that they were talking as to the means of replacing their lost canoe. Two of the party finally started down the bank in a run. They soon returned, by water, having succeeded in finding a boat.

When all had settled in the craft, the water almost came over the gunwales, so small was the canoe and so heavy was its burden. 'Twas a difficult operation to paddle over the stream without endangering the party with swamping.

The sun was high in the heavens when they reached the center of the Ohio, its beams falling upon them with unrelenting heat ; and as the progress thus far had been attended by much labor, the red-men were perspiring freely.

Here the paddling ceased in order to admit of rest, and for something *else*. Allen had moved about considerably, rocking the boat and causing it to take in water, much to the mortification of the captors, which so angered the smallest of them that he leaned over and struck the youth a smart blow in the face with his fist. No resistance could be offered.

"Try to drowned, ugh?" growled the assaulter, striking the helpless young man again. "Do it 'gen, an' den me kill pale-face! Now be still--no move canoe 'gen!" And ending his speech, he showered more of his fistic castigation in the face of the defenseless white.

"Loosen me, you brute," cried Allen, "and I'll teach you the art of pugilism! Release me, you fiend, and again I will toss your babyish body to the winds!"

But the Indian could not comprehend his meaning ; and the more Allen struggled to free his limbs, the more he pounded the handsome face ; and he ceased not until he saw the danger of overturning the canoe.

Resuming the paddles, they soon reached the Ohio shore ; and after concealing the canoe and giving the dead warriors a burial of leaves and sticks, they untied the thongs on the

captives' ankles, and forced him to walk between them through the forest.

They met another party of braves in a very short time, in command of which was Red-pole, a tall savage previously mentioned as being in league with Eustace Everard, and who now took charge of the entire band, leading them in a course that would strike upon the renegade.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BRIGHT-EYED EDNA

EUSTACE, the renegade, after leaving the "strange and timid individual," Ham, commenced the ascent of a steep hill, whose sides were green with shrubs and void of trees.

By screening his face with his slouched hat, and by keeping his hands as much as possible from the briars, this careful villain managed to reach the summit of the scarp with no dreaded scratches upon his beauty. He was and had been equally successful in avoiding tanning also.

But, regardless of these facts, his face has undergone some change since first we saw him. Then we viewed him as a villain; now we see him as the same; but his eyes are sunken; he moves in a weary way, as if sickened with life and longing for death. He pants when he rests at the hill-top, and says:

"If my *never-failing* fortune does not elude my grasp, Edna Wheeler will be my own forevermore. I've told her the truth, now, in regard to—to Allen's death; and while she believes it she will suffer. I had no idea that she loved the young scoundrel so much, or, maybe, I would not have been *cruel*! He! he!"

From his elevated position he had a view of the river; and as he turned he saw an object on the water that resembled a piece of floating wood. After a few seconds spent in gazing, which resulted in a failure to make out the distant thing, he started away, little imagining that it was a craft containing his brother.

"Nothing to be afraid of, I think ; yet I *should* be apprehensive in regard to that red dog, Red-pole, following me ! When I left the burning cabin, with Edna in my arms, the chief was endeavoring to put his hatchet into the brain of Wheeler, running him hither and thither. I hope from the bottom of my heart that the old man is dead ; for he saw me, and, if free, will follow in my tracks to the end of the earth," he said, slowly moving away.

"'Tis strange," he added, involuntarily halting and looking at the ground ; "'tis very strange that no one has been in search of—Allen ! Mother—ha ! there it is again—that name—it strikes me to the heart like a sharp spear ! Ha ! I say—I mean to say that mother surely suspects something *now* ; since neither of us go home any more, she most certainly knows all. She saw me get the knife that night, but instead of knowing that *he was* already dead, she supposed I was going to *murder him* !"

He shook his form—'twas a shudder of horror—as one tries to rid himself of an awful spell, and again slowly moved over the hill-top. He did not mutter again, nor show by look that he entertained thoughts similar to those expressed before. He did not pause in his course until a figure lay at his feet, bound and corded as a criminal.

The soft, velvety sward, shaded from the fierce sunbeams by an oak tree, held a form of virgin grace.

It required but a single glance to decide as to the extraordinary beauty in the young face. A cursory look would suffice to see that her cheeks were rosy, 'spite the sorrow lying upon her heart, and that she surely was the bright-eyed, lovely Edna Wheeler, the love of Allen.

She was bound with thongs, the tightness of which cut deeply into her flesh, proclaiming that her captor was loth to lose her. It was a sight to arouse pity in the hardest heart—a tender flower like her tied down as if she were a slave !

She might have been dead or asleep to a looker-on, she reclined so still with closed eyes ; but she moved when Eustace Everard parted the clump of bushes and stepped slowly to her side. Edna lifted her head, slightly displaying a mass of brilliant hair that had been loosely strewn over the green grass.

"Edna!" he said, in a low, solemn tone, standing over the prisoner of his strange love. "Edna!"

She did not answer. Her beautiful face looked up in his wicked one, shaded by the old broad hat, with a mingled expression of fear and disgust.

"Edna!" he repeated, impassioned by the holiness in her entire appearance—that purity upon which *his* gleam dared fall—and feeling a sudden consciousness of his terrible wickedness and of his unworthiness of her. There came to him, as he let his eyes fasten upon her angelical face, a realization of his crimes; it came to him like an electric shock, and with it a wish that he had been good, and had striven to be a man and worthy of a *woman's* love.

Oh, the thoughts that flashed and re flashed like lurid lightning through his heart and brain! How he regretted the step he had taken toward gaining this maiden's love; how he even loathed himself as he felt the eyes of Edna Wheeler burning into his very soul. He wanted to free her, and leave her, and go away and die; but the bad overpowering the good, he shook himself again in that shuddering way, and banished all reflections.

"Sir, do you intend to prison me forever?" questioned she, trying now to evade his sinister glare.

"I come to release you, Edna," he responded, stooping to untie the thongs that held her person to the earth.

A bright look, like a golden sunbeam falling upon a shaded brook, lighted up her face. 'Twas an expression of hope; but doomed to be chased away by a gathering cloud.

"Mr. Everard, you come to free me. Thanks! thanks!" As she finished he lifted her to her feet, having thrown away the fetters. She bowed to him, her look one of joy, and made an attempt to leave him; but he leaped forward and took her arm.

"Not so fast, my darling!" he hissed in her ear.

"Sir! did you not hasten to unloose me and give me the liberty to go where I wished?"

"No! I did not," he replied to her angry query.

"Did you not say you came to release me?"

"I did; but the meaning of those words does not extend so far as you have, perhaps, supposed. If you inferred from them

that my intentions were to give you your entire *liberty*, you were much in the wrong, and deserve to be called a little fool !” He was changed now. When she lay confined in the cords he had called her name with a touch of compassion in his tone, and, with woman’s discernment, she had seen that he was wavering upon a decision to become more human. Now that she stood before him defiantly, he became a victim to his nature again, and while his blackish eyes flashed upon her, his grasp tightened to painfulness upon her arm.

“What did you wish me to understand by your speech, then ?” she cried, striving to throw off his hold, but in vain.

“I desire you, my love, to know that I came to carry you from this place.”

“Carry me away—where ?”

“Far from here ! where people of our color never venture ; where the *wronged* red-man roams without fear of harm ; where we can go and live in happiness ; where *that* can never haunt me in dreams or awake ; where I need have no fear of an avenging arm ; whe—”

“That will do ; in answer to which, sir, allow me to say that you will go without me,” Edna interrupted. “I have no longing for such a home, and will not go.”

“There would be truth in your assertion, my flower, were I not so intent upon having it the contrary.”

“There *shall* be truth in that assertion, even though I pierce myself to the heart to render it so !”

“Little fool ! little fool ! You talk as if I were not yet from under my mo—my mother’s care ! Ha ! ha !”

He laughed more to dispel the shackling power that dropped, as from above, upon him when mentioning the name of “mother,” than to ridicule the being at his side.

Edna quickly sought with her eyes his face as he burst forth into such a maniacal semblance of laughter ; then looked away with a terrible fear aroused by what she saw. The worn, russet-colored hat was drooped over the glaring eyes, as if trying to conceal the murderous gleam ; the mouth was contorted to a hideous unnaturalness, and *frothing*, as a wild beast when maddened ; while the other salient points of his visage were drawn to a ghastliness unspeakable !

He did not see her, apparently, though she could not wrench

herself from his clutch. His sight was directed above all earthly things, and stared into the nothingness beyond. There came a change at last, such a change as comes to a maniac on his delivery from a fit of madness and disordered intellect.

Eustace Everard, truly more deranged in mind than sane, suddenly resumed his usual manner, and turned his attention to the girl. She had changed, also.

Instead of standing in her proudly erect attitude, she hung as a lifeless form upon his extended arm! The intense pain caused by the grip of his vice-like hand and the horrible actions he had shown before her eyes originated a faintness in her naturally courageous heart, and she swooned. She had been spared a fall to the earth by his hold; and by that support she now remained, her dark hair streaming back in a beauteous tide.

"My never-failing fortune now deserts me, and I have killed her. Nay; she is not dead; only unconscious," he said, as he drew her to his breast. Then he lifted her in his strong arms and bore her down the hill, his intentions being nothing more than to repair to the bushes containing Ham Harling—otherwise, with the renegade, "the green and cowardly woodman." It had never entered the young villain's head that this stranger was the bold hunter who had, a few nights previously, ran his canoe out on the river in plain view and fired at him, Eustace, killing an Indian, through the imperfect light, instead. Neither did it occur to him that the "timid personage," was none other than the famous Ham, the hunter, whom he had seen frequently in the settlement, and who had once remarked in his hearing; "Boys, that feller with a big hat warn't made fur nothin' but a dirty, mean renegade; and, chaps leetle and big, mind now he'll be one, sure's I'm a six-footer!"

At the time, the cutting words had caused him some uneasiness; but as time sped on he forgot them and the speaker, and had fulfilled the old man's prophecy, in ignorance of its truthfulness. Yet the honest soothsayer would make himself known ere long; but not before he had rescued the maiden from the malefactor's hands.

Eustace bore his fair prisoner down the slope, the latter remaining unconscious. He thought once of turning his course, and proceeding to a small stream where he could dash water

into her face ; but taking into consideration the precious moments he had lost, he hurried his steps toward the hunter.

He soliloquized much on his return, his entire speech being centered upon his "never-failing fortune."

When he had nearly reached his destination, and was passing under a low, sweeping limb of a tree, the quietude of the forest was destroyed by the quick report of a rifle, prior to which he had heard a voice, as of some one crying in an angry tone to another. Involuntarily he pulled at the rim of his hat to hide his face, and darted under the bushes, and silently sped away.

He was well aware that he had friends among neither his own people nor the red tribes ; having made foes on a small scale with the former, as well as proving false to the covenant made with the latter.

Red-pole, leading a few warriors of a large band, then committing outrages which darken the pages of history, further upstream, had not entered into an alliance with Eustace in furtherance of obtaining the latter a "squaw," and, as can easily be imagined, he was enraged on discovering that the blood of his best braves had been spilled for nothing. What agreements had been performed were now cast away ; and while five savages pursued Mr. Wheeler, on his flight from his burning home, the remaining ones started upon the trail of the apostate. Actuated by the idea of having the "wild-wood flower" for his own, the chief followed with celerity the trail of the youth.

Eustace had hardly left the spot, whereon he had stood when he heard the rifle-shot, ere a man, with a pleasant but flushed face, came under the tree and began loading his gun. It was Albert Wheeler, excited and angered to trembling. When in the act of leaving his position he looked at the ground ; then quickly stooped and picked something up.

Holding the article before him, he soon came to a conclusion as to whose it was, or had been. 'Twas a coarse-looking glove of deer-skin, with proofs upon it of much use. Knowing that the thing was the property of Eustace Everard, he flung it from him, in which act he noticed an object fluttering upon a bush. No sooner did he grasp it than he scanned the earth, then hurriedly went away, in the very steps of the renegade.

Everard had dropped a glove in his haste, and the girl had left a fragment of her dress upon a bush in passing by it; thus giving the father, rather unexpectedly, a clue to the whereabouts of captive and captor.

But we are to deal with the pursued in this case.

By making a *detour* the young man believed he could elude the enemy who had fired his weapon; and with that belief he made such a wide circuit that he soon realized the folly of it. In his hurry and excitement his course turned so that ere long he stood upon the river-bank. Where the "stranger" was waiting for him he had not the least idea. He understood the absurdity of trying to find him, also, in such a dense forest. There was nothing to do but to carry his burden back into the wood, and to remain concealed there until the protecting shades of night should fall.

This he decided upon doing; and as Edna was showing signs of returning consciousness, he started immediately, lest she should cry out and attract the notice of the savages who he feared were in the neighborhood.

Traveling through the trees and bushes with no danger in sight, he soon gathered courage, and became more self-possessed. The scene began to look familiar as he lengthened the distance between himself and the river; and to his relief, he came to the place, clear of underbrush, whereon he had first seen the man whom it was now his greatest desire to see. Why he was so desirous of again beholding this personage (Ham) he could not have said himself. Perhaps a feeling came to him at times that he was all alone in the world, having no friends—this may have caused him to be desirous of the companionship of a fellow-being.

Be that as it may, he now concluded to make up for the time he had lost, by hastening to the woodman. This he could easily perform now, having struck upon the trail he and the fellow had left in going for Edna.

Ham had not moved from the bushes, and the two, the girl by this time fully restored to her former self, in a score of moments stood over him. The hunter was sitting on the earth with an expression over his face of intense fear, and as the eyes of Eustace fell upon him he gasped:

"Oh, mister, I am powerful glad you've come!"

"What's up now?" asked the other. "You seem scared. What has happened? Nothing serious, I trust."

"I am shot. Mort'ly shot, sir;" and as he concluded he pointed his finger to a little pool of blood at his side and displayed an ugly cut upon his yellowish neck.

"Get up," cried the victim of the Indian-fighter's stratagem, in a tone of superiority. "Stand up here, and I will see to your wound. It is only a scratch. Stand up!"

"I can't," howled Ham, "I'm too weak! Oh, I wish I'd never come out hyar. Oh—oh!" Here, after apparent efforts to rise to his feet, he fell upon his back; and while his visage underwent numerous and comical changes, he gave the twain music that at once was laughter-provoking and seemingly actuated by severe pain.

The maid being well acquainted with Ham, and recognizing him at the first glance, could scarcely comprehend the meaning of these chicken-hearted actions, coming as they did from a man whom she had long known to be a hero and whose name she had oft heard in childhood as the one of a brave, true-hearted being. It was hard to think that he had listened to the voice of cowardice, and had submitted to the wishes of the base, cruel Eustace Everard. Yet she did, as he continued his babyish bawling.

The young man seemed to have his attention drawn away from the others at length; and the hunter seizing upon this favorable opportunity, quickly and easily conveyed to Edna's mind, by a simple gesture, that his manner was only a game of his own to rescue her life.

Perhaps, had she not been the sensible girl that she really was, she might have betrayed to the villain the hope that sprung up within her; but when he, still keeping a firm hold upon her, turned and scanned her face as if suspicious of such a thing, she appeared the same downcast captive. Neither did the old man cease his pretensions; but his noise expressed more pain than before, if possible.

"Look here!" exclaimed Everard, stooping and grasping the throat of the other, but not releasing the female, "I've had enough of this nonsense. Now get up and follow me, or I'll choke the life out of your cowardly carcass."

Almost forgetting the part he was playing, the hunter soon

stood up in an angry attitude, handling his long blade nervously ; but he managed to " cool off " and said :

" Can't you let a feller alone ? Whar you goin', anyhow ? "

" Hush ! Not so loud—we are followed ! I am going far from here, and if you wish to keep your hair you had better come along. Do you know who shot you ? I heard the report of the weapon. Was it white or red ? "

" White or red ? White ; " in the manner of a vexed school-boy.

" Are you certain ? "

" I reckon I am, you confounded questionizer. "

" Do you remember how he looked ? "

" Yaas. 'Twas old Wheeler, I'm sartin, " snappishly.

Here Edna uttered a low cry of joy, and her captor evinced considerable fear in his face and mien. Both had, with feelings at variance, believed that the pioneer was dead, having become the victim of Red-pole's weapon ; and, naturally, both felt emotions at this knowledge, though of a widely different nature.

" Is that Edny ? " drawled the woodman.

" Never mind that, sir. Our duty beckons us onward ; and we must go. I repeat it ; follow me. "

He had scarcely ended his pompous speech, and had hardly dropped the arm he had waved, ere the low sound of coming feet was heard. To substantiate their fears a party of Indians emerged from the shadows of the bushes and trees, and advanced with that motion peculiar to trailers, in the plain marks made by Eustace. This little band, with a prisoner, was none other than Red-pole's. The manner of their progress proved that they were following the apostate and his prisoner.

CHAPTER XII.

HUNTER AND RENEGADE.

As the enemies continued to advance, Eustace let go his grasp upon Edna. This could have been caused by nothing more nor less than fear aroused within him.

The maiden readily availed herself of that which she had watched and waited for—release from his grip—and before either of the men could stop her she darted away, and was soon hidden in the bushes.

Everard was on the eve of pursuit, whispering with glaring eyes, that if he overtook her he would end her existence by a thrust of his "pretty knife," which weapon he brandished in the hunter's face, when the latter's heavy hand came with stunning force upon his shoulder.

"Hyar ! Oustess Evergreen, you jist squat and let her go. She's able to take care of her life till she gits to the fort. Don't squirm and look so puzzled, 'cause I'm in no foolin' mood a' present. There, there ! ye can't make any betterments to your face by jerking your condarned old hat. Now, be still !"

The renegade writhed under the grasp of Ham, and his face was filled with astonishment. As a matter of course he had considered this man as nothing better than a coward, and had hoped to lead him, and influence him in order to bring him under his control. Therefore, his amazement was not astray when the burly form seemed suddenly endowed with courage, and the arm and voice of an Indian-fighter came upon him. He was not only astonished beyond conception, but stricken with terror.

An enemy held him, and more than a score of red foes were coming upon his trail, and, perchance, Wheeler was further in the rear, placing him in a position that chased even thoughts of hope away.

Such strength did the hunter's limbs conceal, that Eustace was pulled over the earth and logs, and through the bushes and vines as if he were but an infant in the power of some fabled giant.

Harling had left the savages, with his prisoner, at an opportune period, inasmuch as they were so situated as to fail to see him as he sprung from cover, and bore away the object of their pursuit.

In his hasty retreat Ham had not overlooked a figure among the red-skins; a figure different in every feature and guarded with no little care.

A single glance had sufficed to show him Allen Everard. This sight did not urge him into the making of solemn vows, however strong an attachment he had formed for the "noble boy," yet, he had an idea of giving his young friend some assistance before the coming night was gone. Neither did it cause him to forget the fair maid whom he had been endeavoring to save from a fate too horrible to conceive, and who had fled, alone, in the dark, almost impassable forest, from a terrible enemy. No; he could not treat Edna with inattention; it would be a happy moment to him when she and Allen should be clasped in each other's arms through his instrumental-
ay, rather.

"Who are you, anyway?" questioned Eustace, when at length they paused in their flight. "I am of the opinion that I have seen you before this day."

"Shouldn't wonder, 'cause I've seen you many an' many a time in the settlement."

"Your name?" evincing his easily aroused fear.

"You'll find out afore we are squar'd up."

"Squared up? Have I ever injured you, sir?"

"Not bad. Once ye shot at me on the river—'twar only a night or two ago—when I's a-crossin', an' you was standin' 'ith Red-pole and other Injuns."

Everard couldn't remember it. There certainly was some error in "persons." He did not know "Red-pole." If the hunter considered him a mean renegade he was in the wrong.

Ham only laughed a contradiction to the apostate's lengthy defense, and finally thundered:

"Do you think I've lived nigh onto fifty year an' not l'arned to tell a renegade from a white man? If you do, you're welcome; but, as it happened, I war well acquainted to your brother and saw you shoot him!"

"Ha! did you?" broke forth the young man, changing in a

moment to one apparently deranged. "Ha! ha! Did you though? Wasn't it a good shot? He, he! Best shot I ever made, if I do tell it, sir. Your name? Have I ever injured you? I *don't* know Red-pole!"

Such a sudden turn in his manners, and the wild way in which he spoke, astounded the woodman. He believed his prisoner was a maniac, and felt disposed to crush him as he would a poison-fanged serpent. But he could not put an end to the miserable being's life, though he thought it would be an act of kindness to all frontier-men, and a deed of mercy to the man.

The renegade rolled his eyes around and cried out, now in a weird voice, then in a manner at once touching in its sadness. He called for Edna,—she *must* come—and promised to not harm her if she would only soothe him to rest, and bathe his burning temples. He raised his hands and begged imaginary lookers-on to take the avenging angel away; he did not want her hot wings to fan his already scorching face, nor her blood-red dagger to hang over his bosom. His face was inconceivably horrible at times, and he endeavored with almost superhuman strength, when raging, to free his body from the heavy foot that pressed upon him, while Ham found it a difficult matter to keep him under control. The broad hat still clung to the head, the "ride" through the bushes failing to displace it, and the long, dark hair was interwoven with the grass and vegetation where he lay, forming a picture upon which the conqueror could but gaze with shuddering emotions.

This seeming insanity enveloping Eustace eventually passed off, and the latter, after several spasmodic efforts to arise, became calm. But the fearful ordeal—may we call it such?—which he had passed through left its mark. Whiter than before, more haggard, weak as a child, Eustace Everard arose as if from a long spell of sickness. So changed in so short a time was he that Allen would hardly have recognized the face, had it sadly looked into his own guiltless one. There was no fierceness in this strange man now; nor did he seem to think of his villainy. Meekly as a lamb, the hunter leading him, he walked in the forest, his weapons in the other's possession.

How wan and sad he appeared on that summer afternoon the old woodman never forgot while life lasted! Neither could he ever forget the feeling that pressed around him like the sultry, close atmosphere that always whispers of an approaching storm.

The air near sunset proclaimed an elemental war fast nearing; but, beyond this there was a vague sensation on the hunter that appeared to be telling of a something coming, coming, that would be nothing less than a human strife.

All the long afternoon of sunshine did they roam, hand in hand, in the woods, the renegade as an infant, the other as a father. Neither spoke, nor showed in any way that such a desire was possessed. It was growing dark when they halted; and where the fiery sun had gone down, great banks of clouds rolled up.

Though they had "tramped" for hours, the distance between them and the place from where Edna fled was not great, so circuitous had been their route. Ham had taken care, in conducting his feeble companion, to keep in the neighborhood of Red-pole's band.

The scenes around them now were full of beauty. In front was the verge of a high cliff, before them the beautiful Ohio, while behind and above were trees and hills blended in with sweet-looking valleys. Wooded slopes and bare scaurs stood here; and there, like a green meadow, could be seen a broad piece of land shaded by a single tree. They sat down upon a plot of grass, and while one bowed his head as if with grief, the other viewed the country in sight.

CHAPTER XIII.

"YOUR FATE, EVERGREEN."

NIGHT came on more suddenly now that the black clouds covered the sky. 'Twas soon impossible to see an object of any size a dozen feet away ; and the two forms sitting in silence near the verge of the towering cliff could discern each other only with difficulty.

Added to the terrible feeling aroused by the inky darkness, was the consciousness of an approaching storm of violence. The wind rushed and raged, and the river beneath was lashed and lapped into fury.

"Where do you suppose *she* is on such a night?" asked Everard, his voice almost lost in the din.

For a few moments there was a silence between them, during which the night was twice illumed with lightning, followed by heavy thunder. The very earth seemed torn asunder, so fearful was the shock.

"I don't know—I can't tell," responded Ham. "Ef I knowed jist whar she is, I'd go an' protec' the *poor* leetle lamb."

"Don't go now."

"Why?" chuckled Ham.

"'Twould be folly. Wait till morning!"

"Wait tull mornin', in a horn! Youngster, I've fooled long enough in gettin' Edna from wicked han's ; now, sich doin's are to an end. *They* shall be together to-night, or I'll go an' stick my head in a sackcloth an' ashes fur time etarnal!"

"*Who* shall be together?" But a crash following, prevented Harling from hearing the query.

"That lightnin' fatched a tree!" exclaimed Ham, as the noise of a falling body was heard. "I tell you, Everard, it's shootin' putty clus' to us."

The two relapsed into silence. The lightning still shot spitefully here and there over the darkened heaven, revealing the forests bowing in the wind and the waters driven

into foaming waves, while a light shower of rain flew before the air, like spray in what seamen call a "stiff gale."

The storm had not abated in the least. If there had been any change, it was the lightning flashing at shorter intervals, and the thunder less frequent. Taking Everard's trembling arm the hunter advanced through the driving rain. In a moment he halted, having taken but a few steps, and said:

"Now, Evermore, I am goin' to show ye what has stood 'afore my face like a picter, ever sence this mornin'. What I'll p'int out to you will be no betterment to your craziness, nuther will ye feel as well as ye do prob'ly, now," said the unprofessional soothsayer, pressing the broad hat over the other's eyes, in order to prevent him from beholding the scene before the "necessary ceremony war done fur."

It was much like initiating a man, blindfolded, into the mysteries of a secret order, with music, as if from a tomb, pour-into his ill-attuned ears.

"Evergreen!" continued Ham, in a judge-like tone.

"Sir?" replied the wretched youth.

"When I git done talkin' an' raise your hat, you must look down—straight down to the grass. And, bear in your stirred-up mind, that I am only revealin' my perdition by your own order, an' not fur my amusement!"

"I will revoke the hastily executed order. Lead me away. Are we not near the cliff's edge? I hear water plashing!"

"Too late now, Evermore, to 'voke the command. You or't to o' said so afore I riz. However, what you'll see ain't a-goin' to hurt ye. So, muster up!"

"For heaven's sake lead me away! This wind—it will carry me off! Remove my hat and let me see where I am! I know I hear the river at our feet!"

"Easy, boy, an' in a flap or two of a rooster's wing we'll leave hyar. After I give you what ye cried fur, I'm goin' to strike out fur Edny an' Allen an'—"

"Allen Everard!" cried Eustace, startled anew.

"Sartainly."

"You search for him?"

"In course. Think I can't find him?"

"I know you can not; for he is dead."

"It's a good' thing fur ye to believe in that away; but all the talkin' in the country couldn't prove to ye that you're in the wrong. Ef he'd come hyar alive, I'll bet my head 'ut you'd yell out, 'Thar's his ghost! thar's his ghost!' jist as ye did at me one night when I war rowin' 'cross the Ohio, an' you thor't as how I war Allen."

Everard did not answer; he seemed to be thinking.

The woodman held him fast and pressed lower upon the white face the old slouching hat. For perhaps ten minutes they stood in quietude, one watching the lightning-disclosed surroundings; the other prevented from doing so and listening to the noisy waves that seemed so near.

"Now," exclaimed Ham, snatching off the blind. "Now, look down—quick!"

And he did look down. The world seemed ablaze, so vivid and prolonged was the lightning-flash that came, as he gazed downward. He uttered a cry of horror and tottered backward; for he was standing on the very edge of the cliff, and far, far below he beheld the foaming water beating against the rocks! He could not speak, nor could he stand unaided by the hunter.

"Your fate, Evergreen, 'cordin' to my doctrin', an' a fearful one it are, to say the least! I wouldn't fall over thar fur a kingdom—not fur a dozen kingdoms. Still, it are yit reasonable to b'lieve 'ut you'll be spared from sich an infarnal goin' under."

During the flash which illumed the earth, while the two were yet within a few feet of the verge of the precipice, both Ham and Eustace saw, directly before them, a twain of pale faces and graceful forms. Though the renegade was much weakened by the night's tortures, he cried:

"'Tis he—Allen! Did you see the gleam of his eyes? He comes to avenge; and an angel—a pure, beautiful angel—is by his side! Your prediction is true!"

"Yes, Eustace Everard, disloyal to your brother and mother, and a brute to the angel beside me, faithless to the wicked cause you embraced, and an apostate to all that was good, your time has come! Beware!" came a deep-toned answer on the wind and from the darkness, rendering the villain powerless in every nerve.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW-COMER.

OUR heroine claims attention now. She had, as has been related, fled from Everard and the hunter when the party of savages, under the chief, Red-pole, appeared. Her eyes, as well as Ham's, fell upon the prisoner of the Indians as she ran away from the scene. The form, strongly guarded, was not a strange one to her; and she saw, with more quickness than did the woodman, whose it was. It was one whom she loved with the love of a good, pure, courageous woman.

Edna, finding that none pursued her, fell into a slow walk, which soon terminated in a halt at the roots of a large tree, whose limbs dipped to the earth, like those of some beech trees, forming a tolerable hiding-place. Under this pretty canopy the fair maid reclined, screened from the gaze of any enemy who might pass that way.

But why did she remain here in the very midst of danger, when it would be almost as easy to hasten to the settlement? Surely she was not fatigued so soon by running—she had scarcely traversed a mile of the forest. Certainly, being the brave-hearted girl that she was, she had not given up in despair. Had the heart of Edna become chilled at the sight of her lover in the unmerciful power of one who was already famous for his cruelty?

Unlike her passionate father, Edna Wheeler threw no blame upon the head of Allen for the crimes Eustace had committed.

Edna's father, under the passionateness of his mind, vowed to put a bullet in the brain of both Eustace and Allen. This he asseverated to his daughter in the cabin, when the renegade and the savages were striving to get within. He afterward added, at the moment the foe was on the eve of victory, that, should he escape and his child be lost, he would not rest until every connection of the villain was slain by his hand. Expostulations and tears from the angel beside him proved unavailing; and, continuing his threats, Wheeler

managed to elude the Indians, though his daughter was "as good as lost."

Actuated by the power that nerved those heroic women of Bryant's Station, to go out in the faces of the red-skin foe, and procure water for the thirsty garrison within, Edna Wheeler resolved to steal into the Indian camp that night, and cut loose her lover's cords! Such an undertaking, she knew, would be dangerous and probably useless.

"Neow look *ahyur*, Mister Injin, I'll swar' thet I hain't done nothin' ag'in' ye nor any o' yer breed! It's right mean in ye tew haul a feller along this here way, jis's he's a cow bein' led tew the alter of sacrifist!"

"Wagh! walk, or me hit head on top."

"Waal, hit an' be durn! Ye needn't think thet beca'se I's raised in Varmount, 'mong peace'ble folks, thet ye kin sass and boss me. The old *man* tried that, an' I fixed him by runnin' away, though I *do* remember as how he licked me one day fur *not* leavin' home. You dry up *pinchin'* me, now! No, I won't go! No; you don't git me inter yer camps."

"Come 'long; Big-owl raise Long-knife's hair, else!"

"Raise it an' go to thunder! Go on; it needs trimmin' Hain't hed it clipped sence now two years ago. Thet reminds me o' my brother once. He used to wear his hair longer 'n goll-darnation,—'scuse me fur sw'arin' in yer presents—he used. Shut up now—I won't go!"

"Must tramp ground over—night come soon—den hard find Red-pole. Come ground over; ugh!"

"He, he! can't skeer me with yer ughs! nur yer wags! But, Mister Owl, tell what'll do. Ef ye'll come an' set down under these long limbs o' this tree, I promise tew go along all right after a bit of rest an' a short smoke. What say?"

"Promises cheap—git plenty now—no good."

"Mine's good. I'll guarantee 'em tew be as good clocks, or, dig-on-it, as good promises as you'll ever find. Recollect, Owl, I'm hyur only a day or tew. Come now—quit *pinchin'*!"

"Big-owl no more fool with fool. Now, kill!"

"Vary waal, Owley."

"Wahoo! No 'fraid tom'hawk?"

"Not o' your'n I hain't. I jes' wish you *would* kill me, Owley. You'd git the worst of it in a long run."

"Set down under tree. Me let stay little time. No much."

"Good! Shake! Yer gooder nor pie an' lasses."

By the conversation just recorded, Edna was interrupted in her reveries. It is needless to add that she was frightened, as well. The drawling tone of the first speaker, ringing in the silence of the forest, caused her to start to her feet as from a pleasing dream, and the guttural exclamation of the other, an Indian, prompted her to cuddle as far from sight as the tree would admit.

She watched them tremblingly while they argued, fearing her plan would be defeated by discovery. Her fear was ten-fold greater when they came toward her hiding-place, and parted the drooping limbs to enter therein.

One of the unknown twain, at least, merits a description.

Perpendicularity is the white man's most prominent feature. Very tall and very straight, and equally thin, he resembled a man originally large, shaved down to the usefulness and grotesqueness of a hop-pole. His face, shaded by a high, minus-brim hat, was proportioned with his body; it, too, had the appearance of a shaving-down and was as good-natured as it is possible for faces to be. Light twinkling eyes, long yellowish hair (which, by the way, gave him not the mean look that such a hirsute appendage did Eustace), and you have examined him. His garments were made of a ~~coarse~~ *coarse* ~~true~~ *true* stuff, fitting his form so tightly as to render him more tower-looking than he really was.

His weapons, which the other carried, consisted of a long, odd-looking gun, seemingly made to suit the present owner (the white), and a knife, extremely short and extremely sharp, apparently made not to suit its rightful possessor.

What name this strange individual answered, ~~and of what~~ *and of what* stuff his heart was constructed, we shall presently see.

The other person was an Indian, whom we have ~~and~~ *and* called "Owley," properly Big Owl, and who seemed to be the white's captor, inasmuch as he watched, ~~with~~ *with* the alertness of a cat, the movements of his enemy. They came and reclined upon the grass, under the branches of the tree, within two feet of Edna, failing to see her white, dispirited face, however.

"Wal," began the white, filling an old pipe, and moving restlessly, as if fearing that the woodvines around him would fall in love with his adaptability to their purpose, and climb up the utmost height of his frame, "Owley, how much fuder is it to yer camp, huh?"

"'Bout mile," replied the savage, losing none of his vigilance, and fingering his prisoner's knife with curiosity.

"Who's this Red-pole you speak on?" now smoking furiously.

"Chief little, not much ; big on fight, d'ough."

"Did ye, Owley, or Red-pole, or any o' yer dirty breed, ever in yer cruel excurzin's meet a big hunter?"

"Ugh ! Big Hunter of Ohio ! Owl see him many time."

"He's got a long gun an' a long knife, an' his face is all kivered with ha'r. That's him, huh?"

"Dat him. Much hair on face, an' shoot long off."

"When'd you see him larst, Owley."

See him dis morning down by creek. He cook goose in de woods, den eat quick, an' jump 'hind big tree."

At this period in their colloquy the man of pale appearance shot up to his feet, crushing his hat into the limbs above, and cried, with all the fervor in his lungs :

"Hooray ! hooray fur Christopher Columbo ! Not thet I care a goll-durn fer the ancient diskiverer, but 'ut I've found, through bein' a pris'ner, the Big Hunter of the Ohio ! Three cheers fer Mister Kit Columbo !"

His voice was one that plainly told its owner was yet young : it rose and fell, from a dismal base to discordant screams on the upper notes. He extended his arms, too, in his enthusiasm ; and lastly, took down his hat and waved to and fro its unworthiness.

"Mustn't do dat," said the Indian, grasping the captive angrily. "Enemy hear cry—come scalp !"

"Look a-hyur, now, don't ye go to puttin' any orders on me," answered the other, looking down, with the innocence and fearlessness that had puzzled "Owley" all day long. "Ther Big Hunter of Ohio is my brother ; I'm twenty year old, an' he's 'bout a couple o' year from fifty, which makes a deference in our age, huh ? Goll-durnation ! Ye ain't a-goin' a'ready ! Don't hurry, Injin ! I ain't near fixed to be presented tew yer

chief, Red-pole. You see, I must fox up a bit—my bat tew brush—my boots tew rub up—my ha'r to comb!—my—Hole on, now, an' I'll go; but don't jerk me!"

Big Owl had seized the young man, and was striving to force him along; but his strength proved useless; the form stood as calmly as one of the trees might under the circumstances.

Edna had laughed repeatedly at the comical voice of the yellow-haired youth; tears caused thereby ran down her cheeks. The sight of one of her own race so near, enlivened her, too.

"Big Owl kill sure, if you no walk ground over."

"Wait a minnit; let me ask you somethin'," whispered the white, pointing under the tree and pulling the Indian's ear to his lips. "Do you see a white thing under there? See it? What in the goll-darnation is it, Owly?"

"Good!" exclaimed the savage, peering in the foliage, now paying little attention to his captive. "Indian now git squaw."

The red-skin carefully placed the odd-looking gun upon the ground; also doing thus with his pristine weapons; and, armed with the short, sharp knife, he began sneaking toward Edna.

The latter almost screamed, and would have fled but for the timely interference of another personage.

Hardly had the red enemy turned his back, when our tall friend grasped the long rifle and dealt him a terrible blow upon his decorated head. Big Owl dropped to the earth, uttering but a single groan in his fall.

"Thanks!" exclaimed the affrighted girl, extending her hand, which the white man took and pressed to his lips. "But for you I—"

"Goll-darnation, miss, don't thank me, fur he's the first red imp I ever killed! Do you know of a feller round hyar named Ham Harlin, the Big Hunter of the Ohio? Do, eh? Whar'd I be likely to find him, huh?"

"I saw him this afternoon; in fact, sir, I was in company with him. He is now in this forest, somewhere."

Edna finally explained to him the why and the wherefore of her being alone in the wood, and in answer to her narrative he stated that he was a brother to Ham the Hunter, and had come from home in search of him, whom he had not seen for years. His name was "Stumpy Harling." The boys "to

hum' guv' him that name, and used to plague him, they used !"

Ere the sun had disappeared, Stumpy had learned that the maid was desirous of giving assistance to some one under the power of the Red-pole band, upon which he swore "eternal revenge !"

"Miss Wheelup, I don't know much, but I'll have him away to-night, or die in the attempt. Pity thet Ham ain't hyar to help us. Wonder if he's a-stickin' to thet runagrade?"

They sat and planned the way to rescue Allen until the night-gloom was fairly fallen, then arose to depart.

"*Goll-darnation !*" cried Stumpy.

"What is it?" questioned Edna.

"Why, *Big Owl's* gone !"

Sure enough he was ; and in all probability he would return with company !

CHAPTER XV

THE ODD-LOOKING GUN SPEAKS.

STORM-CLOUDS darkening the sky induced Red-pole to halt. The sun had just disappeared when the small band rested in the wayless wood at the top of a beautiful hill.

Though in danger of being seen by border-men, the Indians built fires and chatted loudly, as if enemies were not within a thousand miles. The whites were not over-numerous, and had suffered greatly throughout the country by the fierce war, to which fact we may attribute the unnatural recklessness of the aborigines.

The predatory incursion of the savages into this portion of the country had proved a success. Of the horrible butchery, contests at forts, and dreadful scenes attending Indian wars, we can not speak.

Red-pole, who is mentioned in history as sometimes accompanying Simon Girty, had taken many scalps, but was not as yet satisfied.

Edna Wheeler must be his pale-face squaw ; and the man

who had proved faithless to both his own and the Indian cause, should die by his *own* hand. He would follow the trail a lifetime rather than lose such a prize as the beautiful maid.

Allen Everard had eaten nothing all day, and to increase his hunger his captors ate savory bits of meat before him, but did not allow him to taste of them. But this was not all he was obliged to endure; strong cords bound his limbs so tightly as to give him great pain, bodily; and the terrible apprehension for Edna's welfare worked upon him torturingly.

The wind was roaring in the trees, and the night had become dark, when an Indian came running into the little camp.

He hastened to the chief, who was leaning, with his arms folded upon his bosom, against a tree, near the wind-scattered fire, and spoke in a low but angry voice, telling him of the events of the day.

Red-pole's face donned a smile of exultation.

"Does the Big Owl think the two are still where he left them?" he questioned. "Can he guide me to them?"

Big Owl was positive that the couple had not moved, and was equally confident that they could be discovered and captured. Upon which assurance the chief proceeded to select a few braves to assist him in the work he had been seeking during the day. He did not intend to lose the "wood-flower" this time, and to prevent such an occurrence as being overpowered he went not alone.

Into the wind and rain and gleaming lightning he and the guide glided, followed by almost a score of warriors; while, behind, the fires flared in the gusts and hissed in the pattering rain as if taunting the few who remained to guard the prisoner.

There were only four Indians deputed to watch over the firmly-corded youth, and they seemed to regard the charge with indifference, for around one of the fires they gathered, leaving Allen in the darkness, and were soon indulging in the "innocent pastime" of drinking that "harmless stuff," whisky.

Observing the carelessness displayed by his dusky wardens, Allen endeavored to avail himself of this opportunity to

escape. None of them were looking toward him; they had to all appearance forgotten their duty. He pulled and tugged at the thongs upon his wrists, but to no favorable end: they seemed to grow more binding.

For some moments he remained silent, and watched the bright lightning and listened to the wind screaming in the branches above. The fires were all extinguished, save the one around which the maudlin miscreants were making pantomimic efforts to excite each other's laughter. 'Twas no small task for the red-skinned inebriates to prevent their fire from being carried away in the rushing air, or from being quenched by the rain; yet, with the persistency sometimes aroused by intoxicating drink, they piled on brushwood every few moments, until the blaze shot up very high and crept a considerable distance on the ground.

This rendered the forest so bright that Allen did not dare attempt to release his limbs again, for fear the enemies would see him, and, in their excited state, brain him upon the spot.

Plain it was to be seen, that the spirits taken were working powerfully upon the imbibers. Gestures grew into blows, and whispers into yells, and the manner in which their limbs moved in a wild dance was any thing but slow and comprehensible.

Their knives and tomahawks were whirled in the night-air, and their demon-like cries followed up every roll of thunder.

The youth had taken this occurrence as an auspicious avenue of escape; but now it more presaged the way to sudden death.

He felt that the aroused savages would not hesitate to put an end to his existence should they chance to spy him; and it was altogether probable that he would be seen, inasmuch as they were, in the course of their frightful antics, nearing him at every step. Regardless now of the firelight shining full upon him, Everard labored with all his power at his fetters.

His wrists were held together behind his back by a thong beyond his strength to break. His ankles were confined in a like manner, upon which he tugged persistently. If he could free his feet he could leap up and run; and if his

enemies were aroused to the intoxicating degree they looked to be, he could easily elude them, notwithstanding the fact that his arms would be pinioned.

To free the ankles without the aid of hands or teeth was a task of no little difficulty. Working his feet alternately up and down within the cords caused no effect whatever.

Finally he placed the ligatures across a sharp root, and soon was sawing away to sever them, which would have most certainly proved successful had not the red-men observed him in his work.

The four rum-maddened warriors sprung simultaneously toward the captive, each with hatchet swung aloft!

Nothing but death now menaced him. These demons knew no bounds to their cruelty in the present state; and as they came up with yells Allen closed his eyes for the tomahawk to go crashing into his brain.

"Edna and mother!" he murmured, and lay quietly awaiting.

"Goll-darnation! Miss Wheelup, ef these Injins ain't a-raisin' partic'lar tear-up. *Guess* my gun's loaded!"

Then came a report, loud enough for a dozen rifles, followed by a yell of pain, and a heavy body fell upon young Everard!

The strong smell of rum told him that it was an Indian.

He opened his eyes and saw that the remaining savages had halted in their rush upon him, and were now standing with faces full of amazement, and weapons half-lowered.

Some one had saved his life—the savage who came first to plunge his weapon into the youth's brain, fell dead not an instant too soon to preserve the latter's life.

There was no such thing as conjecturing who had spoken so strangely and fired the timely shot; both voice and report of the gun were novel; sufficiently so to frighten the trio of reds.

Some unknown person had cried in the very midst of a peal of thunder: "Miss Wheelup." Did he mean Miss Wheeler? In all probability *she* might be in company with a hunter who made mistakes in names, as did Old Ham!

"I say!" called Allen, when the storm was quieter than usual. "Can you not give me assistance?"

A silence ; the wind, the thunder, the entire storm, seemed waiting for an answer. For at least ten minutes did this quietude last, during which the three Indians moved not, but stood in the same position the report had thrown them.

At the end of those ten minutes the place was illuminated, brighter than the dying fire could render it, and following was that roar of a gun, now resembling thunder.

That was the answer to Allen's question, and a pretty forcible one, too ; for it gave one of three his death wound, and caused the twain to run away as fast as the imbibed whisky would admit of, the darkness soon swallowing them up.

"Friend, hasten and loosen me ere Red-pole and his score of followers return," cried Allen.

He would have said more, but an angel form bent over him and smothered the rising words with kisses !

"Oh, Edna, my poor little darling !—"

"There ! that will do, Allen, this being no time to dally," she said, in trembling tones, and after kissing him till Stumpy, near at hand, cried "Gall-darnation !" in a chuckling voice, she cut her lover's fetters with a sharp knife.

Though he almost knew the returning savages were near, young Everard drew his love to him, and held her in a fond embrace.

Edna nestled in his strong arms and received his caresses becomingly.

"I don't know much," broke in Stumpy, picking up his knife, which Edna had dropped, then beginning to load his gun in a hunter-like manner ; "I say, stranger, I ain't much account, as my dad used to say when in a gall-darned rage—parlon me fur swearin' in yer presents—but I know ef we loaf hyar any longer we'll be cotched by them Injins what's s'archin' fur me an' Edna."

"Which is true, very true," answered Allen ; and grasping the tall youth's hand he added : "For what you have done this night in saving my life, I can *never* repay you."

"Don't ! Now *don't* ; fur I've b'en paid over an' over ag'in in an onexpected manner. Mister, I'm Old Ham's brother, an' ef it hadn't a b'en fur hur, as you've got in yer lovin' arms, I expose I'd never found him. Yaas, I'll shake on the strength of him bein' my relation !"

"Hark!" whispered Edna. "I hear footsteps!"

"And—goll-darnation! hyar comes about *ninety-nine million o' Injins!* You two run, an' I'll foller!"

A wild yell of exultation mingled with the storm din, and guns flashed forth their contents upon our friends.

"I'm shot!" screamed Stumpy, falling upon his face. "Don't stop fur me, but run fur yer very life an' *her's!*"

Allen needed no second bidding from the brave and singular youth, and seizing Edna in his arms he hastened down the opposite side of the hill into the wild night.

Fortunately the forest in his course was rather sparse of underbrush and the like, allowing him to flee with more celerity than had it been otherwise. The cries of the foe had died out, and now the deep thunder and vivid lightning, which struck Eustace with terror, falls upon the ear and eye. The darkness was intense, and only with the aid of the flashes of light could the young lover observe their surroundings. Finally he said, breathing short:

"Edna, let us rest." And as she slipped from his arms he fell, exhausted by the long run, to the ground.

"Where are we, Allen?" she asked, tremblingly.

"I know not, love—but don't despair."

"Should we become lost we should be no better off than Indian captives. Let us remain here until morning."

"No, no; that is useless. The storm will soon be over, and as I hear the river, we may as well make our way toward it."

Hand in hand they walked on, the pitiless rain descending upon them, and the crooked flashes pointing out their path, each heart beating with a fond and fervent love. She, in soft whispers, tells him of her trials since their separation, and dwells long upon the search, made by Stumpy and herself, for the fire where Allen lay a prisoner, while he in return tells her how much he loves her. Though all is dark and damp and chill, it is a night ever to be remembered by them as one of happiness. In the shady years long after they will recall it, and discuss it at their fireside, and pronounce it a memory that thrills the being with love anew.

"I hear the river splashing plainly now, Allen."

"We must be near it," he replies, and halts to await the

welcome lightning-flash. She stands within the circle of his arm and both are silent. They are listening.

"Allen, did you not hear that voice?" she whispers.

"No! What was it?" he answered, as a terrible feeling comes over him. "Did you catch any words or not?"

"Yes. It was your brother's voice. Oh, Allen, it sounded like the hollow voice of some lost spirit! There, listen!"

Only three words came upon the wind, and they were: "Muster up, Evergreen!" Then came a lightning gleam, which caused Edna to recoil into Allen's arms, and the latter to draw back with cold chills creeping over him.

Within a few inches of a cliff's edge they had been standing—a single step would have carried them over! Before them gleamed the eyes of Eustace Everard, who was supported by Ham, the Hunter! 'Twas an awful time and place to meet a brother as a deadly enemy, yet Allen escaped the hold of Edna, and sprung forward, giving vent to a speech already recorded in the latter part of a foregoing chapter.

"Allen, Allen, he will kill you!" cried Edna; but a powerful gust of wind and rain drowned her words and forced her back toward the verge of the cliff. She knew of its nearness and turned and ran the other way.

"Goll-darnation! you hyar! Lucky I come this away," and her form was caught in the long arms of Stumpy, who drew her up to his breast and held her in a brotherly clasp.

"Oh, sir, save him, save him! Listen, they are fighting!"

"Who's a-fighting? Listen to what?" answered Stumpy, getting Edna's appeal considerably mixed up.

"The brothers! They are battling! Hear their knives!"

"I'll settle thur quills! Goll-darn ef I don't, ef I'm shot!"

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE CLIFF AMID THE STORM.

STUMPY HARLING, though wounded, shot forward as only tall youths can.

He heard the ominous clash of knives and the mutterings of the contestants, and with the entreaty of Edna still ringing in his ears, he neared the scene of strife, resolved to save the life of Allen.

Soon the oft-recurring glare of the lightning revealed to him the contest of the brothers, and he was not a little impressed by its ferocity. Eustace, with his hat still clinging to his heavy hair, held a long knife, and was acting upon the defensive. His face was wild and his eyes fairly gleamed with despair, yet he cut, thrust, and parried with a skill superior to his opponent's.

Allen grasped a weapon much smaller than the one he battled against, and used it with no visible effect, so adroitly did Eustace cast the impetuous blows aside.

A third personage, of burly form and whiskered face, was apparently striving to separate the antagonists ere the contest should prove fatal to one, or both; but, as Stumpy plainly perceived in the electric gleam, such a thing as parting them was impossible. The younger seemed fighting for revenge only, while it was evident that other, of the slouched hat, was simply doing all within his power to ward off death. Eventually a voice shrieked:

"Take him away—for the sake of Heaven take him from me! It is none other than his spirit—*his avenging spirit!*"

Then came a rough, imperative, hoarse cry:

"Allen Evergreen, let him alone—he's nigh onto death now. Remember, Ever—he can't—*stop*, I say!"

"Yaas, let him be, fur this gal can't stand it ef a particular one on 'em necessitates a funeral," cried Stumpy, landing at the spot; and feeling in the darkness the arm of some one, he pulled him away. A pair of arms grasped him, and some one cried:

"Who's this 'ut puts in whar it's none of his business? Answer. You're the only man that ever handled Ham Harling in sich a way. Sing out, mighty quick, or I'll—"

"I'm Stumpy Harling, an' ef you're Ham, I'm ye'r brother, as sure as the old man driv' me from hum'. D'ye hear?"

For a moment the two rough forms were pressed together in a bear-like hug—after years of separation they stood together. The lightning glared upon these two pictures—one, of brothers in a loving embrace; the other, of brothers in deadly combat.

For only a moment did affairs remain in such a state.

Ham seized Allen and drew him, in his struggling, away from his adversary, while the youth grasped Eustace, who had been driven on the very verge of the cliff, and carried him in another direction.

"Looke, Allen Evergrab," said the old hunter, confusedly, "thar's no use in ye doin' this away. He is *ye'r brother*."

"I know it, Ham, but I was excited. If you had not pulled me from him I would have forced him over *there*! Thank you for your interference. I do not want his blood upon my head," faintly responded Allen. "Where is he now? I can forgive him."

"My little brother's got him. He'll hold him, too. Oh, but he's strong! Lor', who'd a thort. Him growed so."

At this juncture Stumpy's shrill voice came upon the wind:

"Hyar, Hamilton, come hyar! I can't hold him no longer. Goll-darnation! he says his ever-flyin' fortune has gone over this bank and fell in the boilin' river; an', may I never see the top of my head, ef he hain't wild to jump over, too. Come, now, Ham, or I'll give him a dig in the ribs with a knife the cook made me a present to. Whoa! I'll wop ye to nothin'."

By this time the hunter had reached the renegade, who was struggling in the grip of Stumpy, with all the power his worn body could command.

"Eustace," said Ham, kindly, placing his hand upon the poor fellow's shoulder, "don't be afear'd. No one shall harm a hair o' your head so long as I stand in shootin' range."

"That is so," emphasized Stumpy; "he means jest what he says, as old Baggs remarked when I hit him with a stone."

"You are all false, and my enemies!" shrieked Eustace, endeavoring to break away from the two rough-looking forms. "You only want to get me in home where you can hang me for murder. Let me loose! He is coming again—he has already stabbed me—*drive him away—see!*"

Another figure came bounding upon the earth toward Everard, the apostate. By the aid of the incessant gleaming from the black heavens, all were enabled to learn who now had arrived. It was Albert Wheeler, none the less determined in his resolve to slay the "Everard tribe!"

He sprung like a tiger upon the wayward youth and bore him to the earth, with his knife striving to find the heart of the latter. This event was so sudden that neither Ham nor his kin could render any assistance to the assaulted one. The darkness was not broken for several moments, during which they heard sounds as of bodies rolling and scuffling over the grass, and at intervals a noise resembling a smothered curse came upon their attuned ears. This freak in the storm, of remaining black for such an unnatural length of time, was unfavorable for Eustace. Had the lightning continued its work Ham would have protected the deranged young man, as he had promised; but the gloom made it impossible; nothing could be discerned.

"Eustace Everard," rung out the voice of Wheeler, which quivered with rage; "you must die, *now!*"

"No, no—oh, let me live!" answered the other, in a tone of supplication. "Spare me—spare me!"

"Spare you! I'll *spare* you. Why didn't you spare my child? Edna—where have you thrown her ruined form?"

"She, sir—she— God save us—"

Oh, the cry of anguish, the cries like those of lost spirits, that arose into the blazing air just then! After the period of blackness, there descended upon a tree, that stood on the cliff, a shaft of electricity more brilliant and more blinding than can be conceived. Then, drowning the screams and expressions of intense agony which came from two doomed mortals, came a terrific crash; the earth seemed shaken to

atoms; the air was filled with flying, hissing splinters and branches; there arose groans of pain from other mortals; another crash, of the falling tree less terrible; a few more moans, and darkness veiled the scene of the tragedy and silence soothed the mangled earth.

Even though the shaft that had torn the tree to fragments had been blinding, neither of the four—Ham, Stumpy, Edna or Allen—failed to see the origin of the cries of distress.

In the short space of an instant each saw two marble-like faces, and a quartette of clinging hands, over the cliff-edge.

Albert Wheeler and Eustace Everard, in their rolling, had gone over the precipice; and had caught with fingers clutching the bare verge, which could have given them no help!

'Twas but an instant that this was beheld with creeping flesh and cold chills; the thunder-bolt prostrated them, one and all. They lay upon the ground, stunned, while the storm, as if it had finished its work of destruction, gathered its somber garments about it and sped across the sky.

Edna was the first to arise. The far eastern horizon was faintly lighted at long intervals now, and the silence, that follows a violent disturbance of the atmosphere, was only broken by the low growling thunder in the distance, and the occasional dripping of the rain from the breeze-stirred forest leaves. Aside from those noises the place seemed to the maiden so dreadfully still.

Where was Allen? Why did not he speak to her? And Ham and his brother, where were they? These questions she asked herself aloud; when the memory of the white faces peering over the cliff and the fingers clutching the edge came to her, and she sprung to her feet to drive it off. She struck her foot against a body. Stooping, with the aid of the starlight which was steadily growing brighter, she perceived that it was her lover, Allen, who, being very nearly returned to his former self, was muttering about the storm being so awe-inspiring.

Edna's endearing words and kisses, and the clear, fresh, balmy air, were sufficient to restore his scattered senses. He, too, thought of those who had perished in such a terrible manner, and shudderingly arose to his feet.

"Were you injured, Edna, by the concussion?" asked Allen,

after she had fallen upon his breast and commenced sobbing.

"No, no ; but my father, Allen ; oh, my poor, lost father !" she answered, with choking sobs. "I can not bear to think of it."

Young Everard strove to console her ; but, as he had a great load upon his heart, and needed more sympathy than Edna could extend to him at present, he broke down, and their tears mingled upon the damp, green grass beneath them.

They were aroused from their position by the appearance of the brothers, Ham and Stumpy, who were conversing in low tones upon the late events. The old hunter was showing to the younger a bullet-wound upon his neck, which, he said, was "done by Wheeler, feller who went over thar, father o' that gal, an' the best an' longest-tryed friend I ever had."

Edna heard the words, and they caused the tears to flow more freely from her bright eyes, and the sobs to become louder.

"Thar, my angel, don't take on so," said Ham. "Though your father come nigh onto guvin' me my last illness, I love him, an' you, too. Ef he could a kep' cool, my rose-bud, this thing o' dashin' over thar wouldn't have happened. He was a powerful excitable man, powerful my chile, but as good a feller as ever drawed bead on an Injun."

"That's so," cried Stumpy, as if, to bring a bargain to an end, he were throwing in something to boot. "My rose-bird, ef I *didn't* know yer dad, I'll sw'ar, for yer sake, thet he was as *good* a man as ever—"

Ham pushed him rudely aside, which did not offend him in the least, and began laying a plan before the lovers by which they could reach the settlement with safety.

It was adopted ; and, to be brief, ere the sun on the morrow was at the zenith, the entire party was within the walls of the fort, where Mrs. Everard pressed her motherly lips to those of Allen and Edna, and the wounds of Ham and Stumpy were attended to. We can not dwell upon the son's news-breaking to his mother. Why need we ? There has been enough sadness ; now let there be joyousness.

At the wedding, which took place a year subsequent to these issues, Stumpy, though comically tall, proved himself quite a

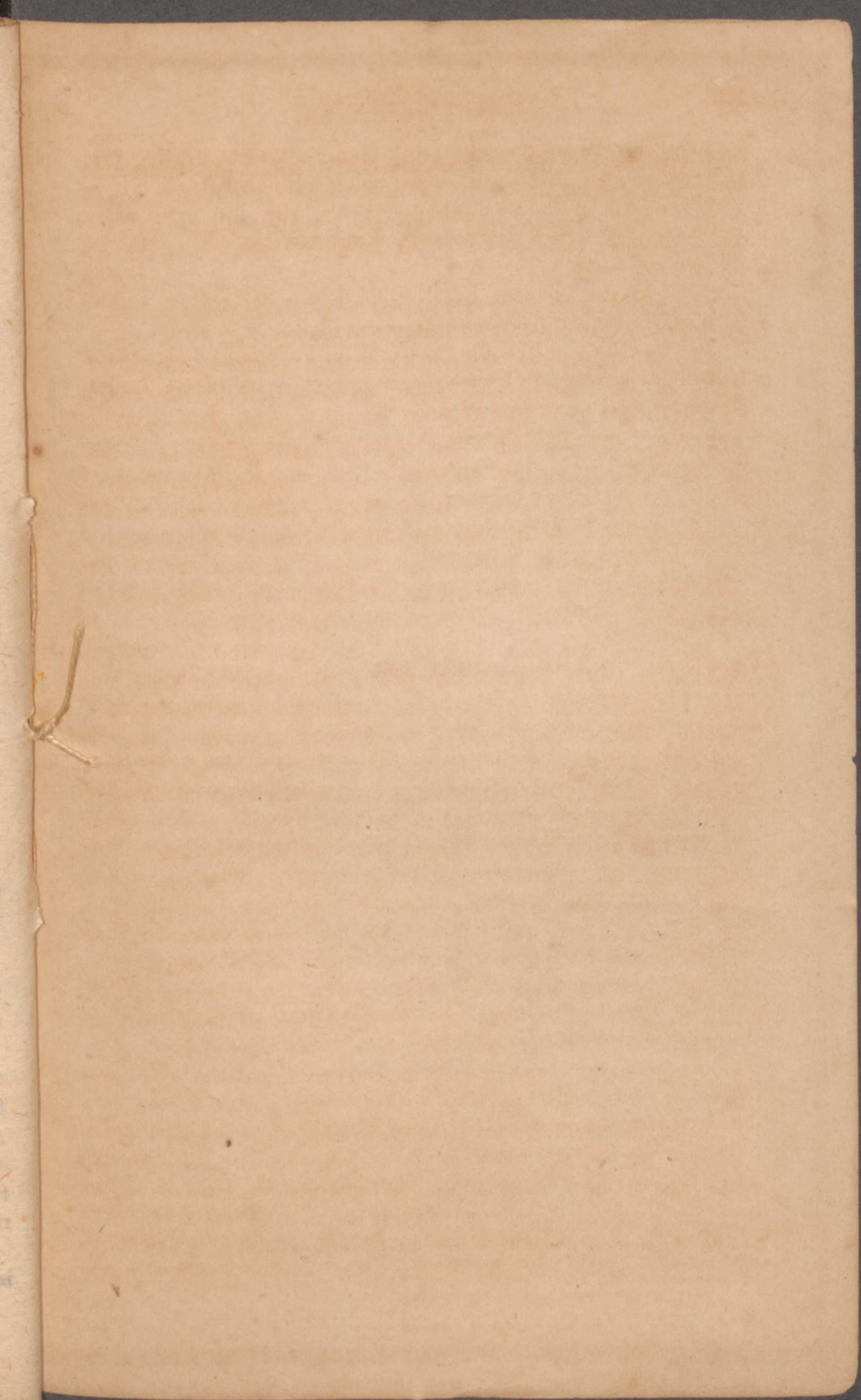
hero in the Terpsichorean art. Ham, with his smiling **fac** and burly form, could not be persuaded into the dance.

The bodies of the two who went over the cliff were never discovered, though a strict search was instituted and continued for several days.

Of Ham, the Hunter, Stumpy, Red-pole and other Indian personages, we may have an occasion in future to speak.

But we may add that the "feller from Varmount" signalized himself in later years by acting in the capacity of an Indian Scout, as well as in that of a lover.

THE END.



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